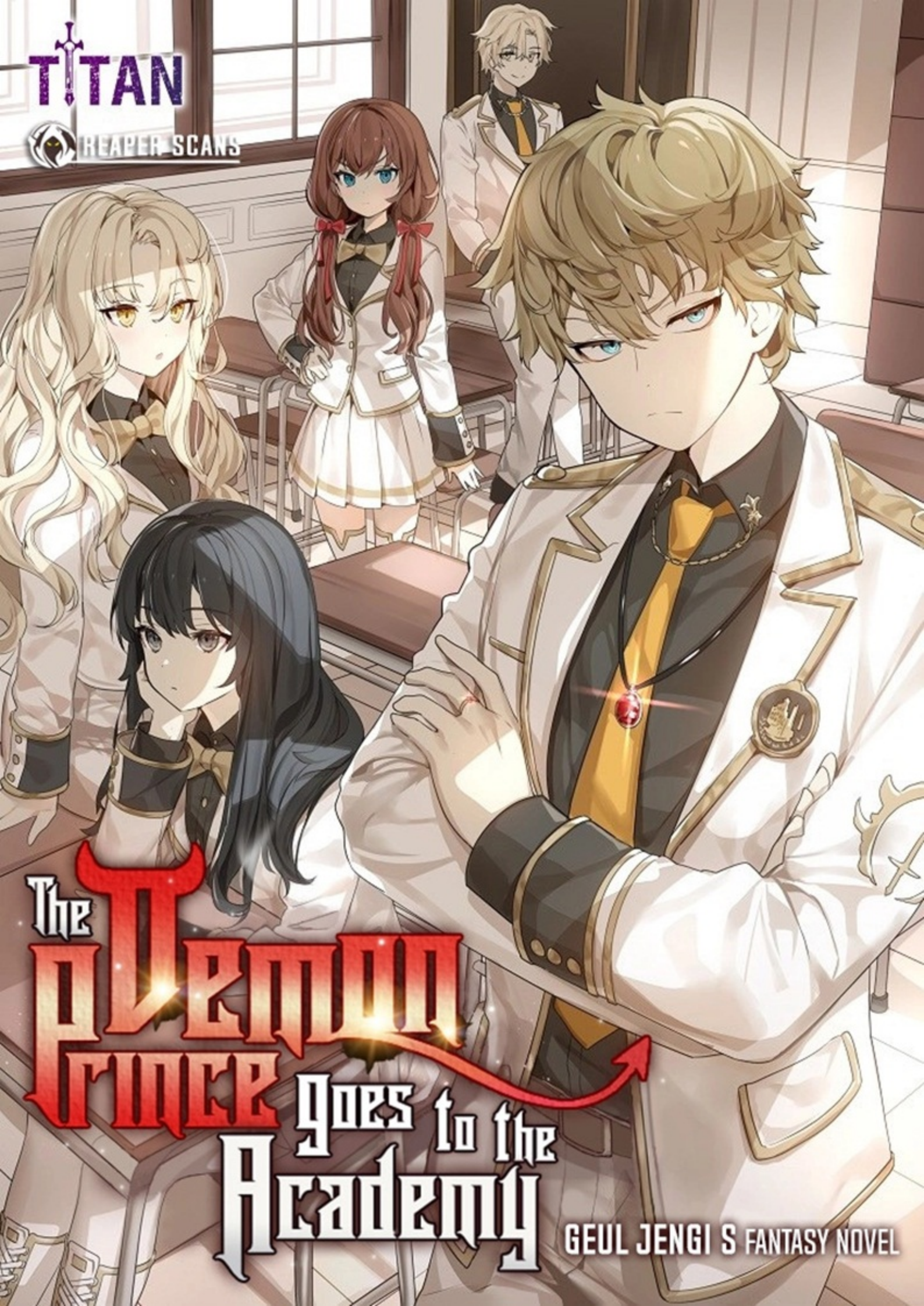
TITAN
REAPER SCANS
The Demon Prince goes to the Academy
GEUL JENGI S FANTASY NOVEL

THE DEMON PRINCE GOES TO THE ACADEMY

–마왕은 학원에 간다 –

- VOLUME 3 -

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RONOPU

[REAPER SCANS]

CHAPTER 101

It was already difficult enough to take the roe deer with us, so we didn't take the jaguar. I had heard from somewhere that the meat of carnivorous animals wasn't edible, so that was one more reason why we didn't take it with us.

Just moving the one roe deer with Liana, who severely lacked physical strength, was already enough in our extremely exhausted state.

"Huff… Huff… Huff…"

When Liana returned to the camp, she almost collapsed near a tree in front of the bonfire Heinrich was struggling to keep lit. The pouring rain kept on extinguishing the fire, but there was still steam rising from it because Heinrich maintained it with all of his effort.

"Grantz, are you okay?" Heinrich asked her with worry.

Liana just stared at him while her limbs shook.

Right.

Heinrich was set up to like Liana.

"You… Does it look like I'm okay…?"

"Ah, that's… Right."

…I now knew what it was.

That uncomfortable feeling.

Wasn't she just a female version of me? She was a female Reinhardt, right? Wasn't she like me? Rude and ready to do whatever it took?

"Aren't jaguars like tigers?"

When I told Harriet how we were able to catch this roe deer, she was surprised to hear that we actually encountered a wild beast.

"They aren't exactly like tigers, but they are somewhat similar."

"…You killed it? You?"

She looked at me as if she couldn't believe it. Surely, if someone heard that two 17-year-olds caught a jaguar, they'd wonder if pigs started flying.

I pointed at the roe deer.

"Then do you think I made those bite marks?"

Ah.

Looking back at it, it seemed like Grantz and I really did talk similarly to each other.

Anyway, the bite mark on the roe deer's nape—the one that had killed it—wasn't something one could achieve with human teeth, only after showing her that did Harriet believe that we had really encountered a beast.

"Didn't you get hurt?"

Harriet looked at me with slightly teary eyes.

"…I got electrocuted, but I'm fine."

"Electrocuted? Why did you get… Ah."

Harriet nodded blankly, seemingly having remembered that Liana was with me.

It was obviously Liana that almost killed me, not the jaguar. By the way, it didn't feel all too bad that she asked me if I got hurt.

The camp had been heavily rebuilt during the rain; the smashed huts were repaired again, and when the kids felt too cold, it looked like they'd return to the campfire maintained by Heinrich to warm up before getting back to work.

As I spun around, I tied up the hind legs of the roe deer with vines and hung it from a

thick tree branch.

And—

-Thud!

“Hiik!”

-Puck!

“Urg…”

-Crack!

—I struck the deer’s neck with an axe to cut it off. I could have just cut its artery, but it was already soaked in rainwater, and the part that the jaguar had bitten into was probably severely infected with bacteria. Blood started to gush out, and honestly, it didn’t look all that pleasant.

Then I cut open its stomach and removed the intestines.

All my classmates who were watching me seemed terrified. Harriet, Liana, and Adelia were even trembling.

They wore expressions that seemed to question how I could do such a thing.

I was also disgusted and about to vomit! But they wouldn’t be able to do it, so I was the one who did it instead!

“You bastards. Do you think I want to do this? What are you looking at me like I’m some bloodthirsty butcher for? Do you want to do it instead? Huh?"

When I nervously shouted that, everyone slowly evaded my gaze.

Of course, my face, hands, and clothes were completely covered in vermillion blood—making me seem really creepy.

* * *

The camp and hunting teams both had to do tremendous amounts of manual labor in

the heavy rain without even eating breakfast.

Even if no one was showing signs of dehydration, it was only natural that everyone was extremely exhausted.

Even with Heinrich, grilling meat in the rain was still very difficult.

Therefore, I let it bleed out and completely skinned the roe deer with the axe and machete. Rather than calling it cutting it up, the expression crushing would be more fitting, as the process was that radical. It couldn't be helped because my chopping and butchering skills weren't all that good.

I put the meat—cut up into chunks—into a large pot.

And then we boiled it.

It was only a simple meal. If we had seasonings and other ingredients, we could make proper meals, but we didn't have such things there. The only seasoning we had was salt.

Together with Heinrich and Liana, who applied electricity to the pot, we heated it up.

When the water in the pot started to boil and the meat started to cook, I could definitely see the looks in the kids' eyes change.

It had been only three days, but their eyes were about to spin because of how hungry they were. They were ready to eat anything, as long as it was tasty—so they just waited for the meat to cook.

Right when the meat was about done, Bertus and Cliffman returned.

"Oh, you caught this?"

Bertus' eyes grew wide as he saw the remaining chunks of deer meat.

Perhaps because he also hadn't found any traces, Bertus caught a total of seven birds and small animals.

"No, I mean, how did you catch so many?"

In a way, one could say that we stole this prey from something else but he actually caught seven animals.

I felt like I forgot that Bertus was actually an amazing guy with both great physical strength as well as intelligence.

"There aren't actually that many pieces you can eat from those."

Still, I thought it was amazing that he was able to catch seven. Bertus started to chuckle as if he had read my thoughts.

"Reinhardt, hunting is a fairly common hobby among nobles. Of course, it isn't that kind of hunting, though."

Oh. That seemed to be the reason why Bertus, the epitome of wealth, was familiar with hunting. Wasn't aristocratic hunting just shooting arrows at prey driven by hunters? Bertus seemed a little more skillful than that. Ellen took the bow, so he hunted like that only with a single spear.

Bertus's hunting skills were excellent, actually.

He looked around the camp and directed a question at me.

"Ellen isn't back yet?"

"I don't think so."

* * *

Ellen had yet to return. I didn't know where she was or what she was doing. Of course, Ellen wasn't one to get into grave danger, so neither I nor Bertus was all that worried. The other kids seemed worried, though.

"I don't think Erich is here either."

Come to think of it, Erich de Lafaeri wasn't in the camp either. At Bertus' observation, Heinrich hesitantly opened his mouth.

"Erich, that guy…"

“What?”

“He said… That he was going to look for Cayer.”

His friend went missing, and no one seemed to actually look for him, so he went into the jungle himself. Kono Lint was also staring blankly into the jungle.

Kono Lint, Cayer Vioden, and Erich de Lafaeri.

Since those three were best friends, it was only natural that they worried about each other.

“This…”

“He went in before I could stop him…”

He took individual actions at a time when doing that couldn’t be worse. Bertus frowned, seemingly pondering a bit, before sighing.

“We’ll think about this situation later. Let’s eat first.”

The deer meat was enough for now, so everyone stopped working and gathered together to eat the meat on wooden skewers.

It was chewy but not to the level that we couldn’t eat it as it was salted.

“A jaguar?”

While answering Bertus’s question about how we caught the deer, we talked about the jaguar. After hearing the report that Liana and I teamed up to take down a jaguar, Bertus seemed slightly stunned for a second.

“It’s surprising to hear that this island has things like these, and even more surprising that you were able to kill one.”

To be honest, I simply hit what Liana stunned, but, in a way, it was also because of my ability that I could block its rush.

After eating for some time, Harriet suddenly burst into laughter.

“Ha, haha… Ha…”

“Idiot… What’s wrong with you all of a sudden?”

Seeing the kid who seemed depressed and annoyed all the time suddenly laugh blankly like that as if she were mesmerized by something, everyone felt shocked. Harriet smiled blankly while munching on the tough deer meat soaked in rainwater.

“Saint-Owan? What’s the matter?”

Seeing Harriet’s complexion, Bertus seemed worried as well.

Did she eat some weird mushrooms while I wasn’t looking?

“N-no… It’s only been a few days, but I’ve already started eating like this as if it’s a given… I just suddenly… suddenly thought it was funny…”

Everyone was eating this deer meat, boiled in saltwater in the middle of heavy rain. It was only a few days, but everyone, regardless of status, was sitting on the bare ground totally engrossed in wolfing down the meat.

Actually, everyone was happy enough just to be able to eat. No one was complaining. Everything just tasted a lot better because they were hungry. They were deluding themselves.

Harriet didn’t even get mad anymore; she just found it ridiculous and funny.

“Yeah, that indeed is pretty funny.”

Bertus continued to eat the meat while chuckling as if he had nothing more to say about the absurdity.

It was especially weird that the nobles were just laughing, not looking like they were in a bad mood. Everyone looked like they had just realized that new fact.

* * *

Even after we finished our protein-filled meal, Ellen and Erich had yet to return. Even after we cleaned everything up they hadn’t come back.

Kono Lint seemed especially anxious about Erich not returning. If I left him alone, he would also jump into the jungle, wouldn't he?

“I’m not worried about Ellen, but Erich might be in danger.”

Bertus seemed to deeply struggle with whether he should worry or not. If we were to go in to find them, we might get caught up in a situation again, it was pretty much a pain in the ass.

“Okay. The camp team should continue with what they were doing, while the hunting team will go and look for Erich as well as scout. Don’t go in too deep.”

“I can’t do anything more today.”

Liana sat down and held up her hand. She had replenished some of her energy, but she had dragged that roe deer here together with me, so she spent more stamina than she could.

“Are you that exhausted, Grantz?”

“I wouldn’t be able to move even if you threatened to beat me to death.”

Grantz seemed to talk to Bertus without any hesitation either.

“Okay. Nothing we can do about it then. Then just the three of us—Cliffman, Reinhardt, and I—shall go in to look separately. We’ll be going in there on our own, so don’t walk in too deeply. Let’s just look around in the outer layers of the jungle and then come back. I think we should be back after an hour or so.”

“Sure.”

“Understood.”

Because one person decided to act alone, three other people had to do the same. Erich probably left the impression of being a useless, unhelpful bastard on Bertus because of this incident.

Bertus and I had a machete, and Cliffman took a javelin and axe into the jungle. All of us entered the jungle in different directions.

* * *

Class A's low-ranking trio. The three arrogant brothers.

Cayer Vioden, Erich de Lafaeri, and Kono Lint.

Cayer was a minor villain who hated and ignored members of Class B, Erich played the role of Scarlett's bully and was fated to receive some true education from Ludwig, and Kono Lint didn't bully anyone in particular, but he lusted after women.

It was supposed to be the entirety of Class A that was like that, but honestly, it was just those three. I, who was placed last in Class A, was able to crush them after they picked fights with me and received my true education.

The talents they possessed were excellent in and of themselves, but their lack of effort put into developing their talents led to them having the ability worth maybe half a penny, or their talents were outrageously tremendous but had fatal flaws.

Still, those three were very close to each other. It was only natural that Erich rushed into the jungle on his own as he was really worried about the missing Cayer, but it was still somewhat surprising.

It was pretty clear that Cayer was probably eliminated, but if we were to go by typical horror movie logic, Erich would also end up eliminated. He might have ended up thinking something like: "Although they told me I should stay here, it should be fine, even if I go out to search for him."

Then, while we entered the jungle alone, every one of us would end up being sacrificed one after the other—that was the standard development.

When I thought about it as a standard horror movie, I found it kind of funny.

Of course, Ellen Artorius, who was thought to be the final girl, would probably end up dying while trying to save the main character at the climax.

And Harriet, who was whining non stop, wouldn't survive for long, obviously.

No, would that mean that Adelia, who was scared of everything and everyone expected to die first, would be the final girl?

So, in the end, Adelia would be the main character; that was roughly how horror movies went.

At that moment, we were at the stage where we were going around trying to find that one person that wouldn't listen, which would end in the tough-guy character getting killed.

Then of us three, would get sacrificed first?

I don't think it would be Bertus.

It was either me or Cliffman.

Wouldn't it be Cliffman in terms of physique? Putting skills aside.

Or the camp with all the non-combatants might get attacked while the three of us were out.

I walked around while thinking about useless things. I wasn't all that concerned about what would happen tonight after all. What would happen to Erich was honestly no skin off my back.

I had no intention of seriously looking for Erich, so I just walked around the jungle.

As long as I survived until the last day of the mission, I would be awarded with achievement points. So whether we won or lost didn't concern me. So it was enough to just go out and act like I was looking for Erich, while I wasn't really. Another reason was that, if possible, I wanted Class B to win. That said, I couldn't do suspicious things, such as giving Class B direct hints.

I was able to take in the jungle's scenery as I was walking alone in the pouring rain.

If there was a hell on earth, I think it would be that. Nature was beautiful but if there was too much of it, one would realize just how shitty it was.

Everything in moderation.

-*Shaaaaaaa…*

Since I was in a place like that, I wouldn't ever need rain sound ASMR again.

Of course, hearing it in person like that was pretty shitty as well.

Even if the rain stopped, it would cause problems. Although I might be able to sleep with a dry body that night, as soon as I entered the jungle the next day, it would be so much more humid than usual.

I might die from that humidity.

While I was thinking about the next day and feeling like shit in advance, I heard it right when I was about to head back.

-I said get out of my way.

-And what would you do if I don't?

I could hear the sound of a conversation through the rain.

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CHAPTER 102

A strange scene unfolded before me as I carefully walked through the bushes.

Erich and Scarlett were facing each other. There was something next to Scarlett, from where I stood, it looked like a beast, so it seemed like her hunt was successful.

The fidgeting Erich stood before Scarlett, who blocked his way.

It seemed like that bastard started arguing with Scarlett as soon as he encountered her out of some kind of habit.

-Hey, cursed eyes, looks like you grew a lot, huh? Talking back to me and all.

–…

-Leave while I'm still being nice.

It seemed like he was trying to steal away the prey Scarlett hunted. Why did this punk go in and find this kid just to make fun of her?

Right when I decided to step out before that guy tried to do anything more…

-Bam!

-Urg!

I could clearly see Scarlett strongly kicking Erich in the abdomen, making him fly. Then she slowly walked towards him, gently trampling on the fallen Erich's face.

-You know, the Princess told me something.

-Y-you cursed bitch…

-No matter what I do to you, she'll protect me.

-Wha… What?

Scarlett landed a second kick into the bewildered Erich's stomach. I could clearly see him sharply inhaling and rolling his body around.

Scarlett looked down at him with cold eyes.

-The only reason I'm not returning everything you did to me a hundredfold is because I don't want to be someone like you.

-*Kick!*

-*Urg!*

Finally, after kicking Erich in the face, Scarlett left while muttering.

-Be careful. I don't know what I'd do if I were to lose my reason.

It seemed like Scarlett held back and ended her vengeance there. She seemed to think that she might end up killing Erich if she were to lose her self-control even the slightest.

Erich couldn't even look at Scarlett, who was leaving, his complexion ashen.

He must have known that Scarlett was far superior to him. However, once he found out that Scarlett would just tolerate his bullying because she was terrified of getting expelled from Temple, he turned into a villain that just continued bullying her.

However, now that she had a strong ally, Scarlett wasn't afraid anymore.

Different from the original, Scarlett now had Charlotte as her ally.

So, instead of having Ludwig help her, she overpowered Erich with her own hands.

After waiting for Scarlett to completely leave, I made my way through the bushes and was confronted with the scene of Erich sitting there, completely terrified.

"Rei… Reinhardt?"

"Yeah, it's me."

I grabbed the arm of that dude that just continued to sit there stupidly and forced

him to stand up.

“Y-you s-saw it. You saw it! You saw that bitch beating me up!”

"I saw it."

“Th-that cursed-eyed bitch finally showed her true colors! She’s like a demon…”

“Oh, shut up.”

I was annoyed at hearing him whine, so I just stared at Erich.

“Are you proud of getting beat up for your fucking actions, you bastard?”

-*Bam!*

“Urg!"

“Why can’t you just sit still? Why do you always have to cross the line?”

The guy just got hit by me for no reason. He knew that I was a crazy bastard, so he didn’t shout nonsense like ‘how you dare to touch this noble body’.

Because, if he did, he knew that I was crazy enough to just hit him more.

“However, that’s the least you gotta worry about. You should be worried about what Bertus will say, you know?”

“Wha… What?”

Three of his classmates had to risk going into the jungle alone just because he decided to take independent actions.

His expression turned pale, not because Scarlett beat him up, but because of my words. He wasn’t sure what he should expect when he returned to the camp.

* * *

“It’s okay to be useless. When people gather, there are bound to be such people after all.”

Bertus leaned against a tree and talked to Erich while the latter had his head lowered.

Bertus had a smile on his face, but I could see that his mask was on the verge of slipping off.

"By the way, I think there's a clear difference between a useless person and an unnecessary one."

Usefulness and necessity were different concepts.

It was okay to be useless. At least those people didn't cause any harm to the group.

An unnecessary person, however, meant someone that would only cause harm to the group. Someone like that was better off thrown away.

He wasn't strong enough to scout the jungle like me, Cliffman, and Ellen, nor did he have supernatural powers or knowledge about magic like Harriet, Adelia, and Liana. Kono Lint played the role of steadily supplying the group with coconuts. He was able to use divine power similar to Class B's Ashir, although they were still very weak, but that guy couldn't even help out with that.

He got put into Class A because his talents included swordsmanship, divine power, and close-quarter combat, but he was incredibly lazy and liked to show off, so he didn't put much effort into the development of his talent at all.

Erich was the perfect example of talent and skill not being actually proportional.

Therefore, along with Cayer, Erich just did chores anyone could do, and then he decided to take the unnecessary risk of acting alone.

Bertus explicitly pointed out that he was even beyond useless—he was unnecessary.

"Erich. Do you want to be someone unnecessary?"

"N-… No. No, no. Sorry. I'm sorry, Bertus."

His tone of voice was rather gentle, but the content of what he said was very creepy. Bertus, who was under a lot of stress, was trying to keep his calm with all his might. However, that idiot acted alone even though he was told not to. He offended Bertus

while the situation was as bad as it was.

Perhaps this would have an effect for quite a while. This must have lowered Erich's usefulness by several steps in Bertus's mind. Erich trembled as he heard Bertus say such things for the first time.

The others might not be able to hear what they said properly, but they looked over here from the side.

"Okay, since you made a mistake, let's give you a punishment: From tonight on, there will be two people standing guard at night."

Cayer, who stood guard alone the previous night, disappeared. So, starting then, Bertus decided to increase the number of night watchers to two.

"Stand guard for the whole night. Let's end it with this."

One of the people having to stand guard would be regularly switched out; Erich, on the other hand, would have to stay as a guard for the whole night. That was why he decided the night watch would consist of two people.

"Th-thank you, Bertus."

Erich, however, was grateful to Bertus for being so generous.

* * *

The camp had been reorganized, and we had enough food for dinner. Everyone was eager to make rainwater collectors to store the rainwater. After the rain stopped, we would have to go back to making distilled water.

By evening, the rain gradually stopped, and Ellen returned.

"…Wha-what is that?"

Adelia widened and murmured.

Everyone was more surprised by what Ellen was carrying on her back than her return.

-Flop

Ellen laid it on the floor and spoke calmly.

“I picked it up on my way here.”

It was the jaguar we killed and couldn’t bring back.

It sure was amazing that she was able to bring it back all on her own. It must have been wet from the rain and unwieldy. Everyone looked curiously at the dead jaguar with the cracked skull.

Ellen tilted her head when she heard that Liana and I were the ones who killed the jaguar.

“Oh… Poor thing.”

"I was almost killed by that thing, you know? How is it a poor thing?”

Harriet found the jaguar with its broken head somewhat pitiful. Heinrich seemed to have a different opinion.

“By the way… What should we do with this? Can we eat this?”

They were of the opinion that it was fine to eat some deer and pig meat, but they felt somewhat averse to eating the meat of this kind of beast.

“I’ll never eat this.”

Liana seemed to hate the idea of eating it, and everyone seemed to agree with her.

“Even so, Ellen went through all the trouble to bring it here… It would be kind of a shame to just leave it like this."

That was what Bertus said. Honestly, even though she was monstrously strong, it should have been a lot of work to bring it to us all on her own.

Well.

However, I suddenly remembered the myth that cat meat was good for one’s

waistline.

If that were true, just how good would wild cat meat be for one's nether region?

That. That would be. Just. Ah. Stop! Would it be that formidable?

I thought about that for a moment, but I didn't want to actually check.

I was still fine down there.

So I had no use for it.

"Well, I don't really know what to do with it, but I think if one were to skin it, one would be able to sell the leather for quite the high price."

Bertus gave us an answer after contemplating for a while. He seemed to be thinking about what we could do with it after the mission, not during.

"Reinhardt and Grantz caught it, and Ellen brought it here, so do you want to share the proceeds between the three of you?"

"I'm good."

Liana shook her head as she wasn't that interested in money. Ellen and I made eye contact, but it felt somewhat lukewarm.

"Even if I wanted to sell the leather… I'm not really confident in my skinning skills."

"Really? Well… I thought you were good at skinning."

Bertus scratched his head as if it couldn't be helped.

"What a pity, these kinds of things could get you about 20 gold coins, though. Even if the condition was slightly bad, I think one could still get about half of that…"

10 gold coins.

10 million won.

"…I think I can do something about this."

Nothing beats money in forcibly unleashing one's creativity.

* * *

I wasn't confident in my skinning and processing skills. However, if we left it alone, it would just rot away by the end of the mission.

Ellen and I dragged the jaguar carcass to Class B's camp.

Class B was almost done rebuilding their camp, and it seemed like they were about to sit down to eat something.

"What's this…?"

When Ellen and I suddenly appeared, dragging a jaguar corpse behind us, it was only natural that they'd start panicking.

They stared silently at the large cat as if they were completely amazed.

"Delphine."

"Yes, Reinhardt. What is it?"

"Could you remove this thing's leather cleanly?"

I wasn't good at skinning, but that girl should know how to do it.

When I asked her that, she clapped her hands, knowing what I was getting at.

"Well… I'm not sure if I can do it well. I'm no expert. Are you fine with that?"

"That's fine. After the mission, we'll sell it and share the proceeds with you. If you want to have the meat, you can have it."

All I needed was the leather, so I decided to shove the meat onto Class B. Everyone on our side was averse to eating it, after all.

Me, Ellen, and Delphine.

The three of us decided to share the proceeds between us. Of course, we had to take

into account, depending on the situation, that the leather might rot away or that it had no commercial value at all.

“It’s just ridiculous that things like these are on this island, and it’s surprising that you were able to catch it, but it’s even more surprising that you thought of selling its leather.”

Charlotte shook her head, saying that she was so surprised she didn’t know what to say.

You don’t care about this mission at all, do you, you punk?!

That’s what her eyes seemed to scream.

No, strictly speaking, it was Bertus who told me to sell the leather and not waste its meat, you know?

* * *

Somehow, I became the bridge between Class A and B, so while they still had to compete with each other, they kind of cooperated with each other, but not really.

It was cooperation bound by money. When the sun went down, the rain completely stopped. Everyone sighed in relief.

Heinrich and Liana began to burn the wet wood, and soon a small bonfire was made. Everyone dried their bodies near the fire. Bertus hung the meat he hunted over the bonfire, going for something similar to smoking. If we left it alone, it would quickly decay in the humid weather.

Seeing everyone huddled together basking in the fire’s warmth like that, we seemed like a small-sized day labor market at dawn.

"Sigh… I think it would have been better if it continued to rain until tomorrow."

Everyone laughed at Harriet’s grumbling. She hated the rain, but when it didn’t rain, she got annoyed as well. While eating smoked meat for dinner, we dried our soaking wet bodies.

“Ellen, you've been in the jungle the longest. Did you find something?”

Because Ellen suddenly appeared carrying the jaguar on her back, we didn't have the opportunity yet to ask Ellen what she had been doing all day.

“I found the others’ camp.”

Everyone’s eyes grew wide hearing that earth-shaking information. Everyone seemed to want to tell her that she should have said that sooner.

“I waited for them to come back, but they didn’t, so I gave up and returned. They probably set up several camps in different places, living in whichever one they like.”

She found one of the others’ camps. However, she also presumed that they had several, not just one.

That wasn’t all.

“And there was something like a bone graveyard. There were also human bones there.”

“Hieeek!”

The others were presumed to be cannibals.

It felt like everyone was intimidated by these words.

“What a nasty setting…”

Bertus seemed to suspect that it wasn’t a Temple group mission but an event meant to instill traumas in us.

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CHAPTER 103

Everyone seemed scared, no matter if it was part of the mission or not. They seemed to question whether it was really part of the mission. At the rate things were going, they were sure to give up.

However, more and more clues were gradually gathered about the others.

The others would raid our camp at night.

They had their own camps all over the island; it seemed like they ate there as well. However, we didn't know in which camp they mainly stayed.

They appeared to be cannibals.

It wasn't clear whether there was just one of them or more.

Everyone understood that catching these others was that special condition.

Catching them was a way to finish the mission early, but it included many risks.

Eventually, after dinner, everyone prepared to sleep with anxiety in their hearts.

"I installed the alarm magic."

Harriet had installed alarm magic around the camp, and it would sound if anything other than us approached; that was the only safety measure we could take at the moment.

Everyone went into their huts, the anxiety apparent on their faces.

Erich would stay up all night to stand guard.

* * *

-Beeeeeeeeeeeeeeep!

The camp was thrown into chaos when the alarm sounded.

“What’s going on?!”

The people that came to their senses the quickest crawled out of their huts. The first to react were me, Cliffman, and Ellen.

The alarm went off, but it had already happened.

-Waaaah! S-save meeee! -Aaaaaaaaah!

We could hear two screams sounding from the darkness of the jungle. The others also crawled out of their huts at that point. Everyone was terrified as they knew what had just happened.

“Wh-wha… What should we do?”

Harriet’s complexion was pale.

We increased our night watchers, but both of them were captured.

“It seems like both Erich and Adelia have been captured…”

The ones kidnapped were Erich, who was a permanent guard, and Adelia, whose turn it was to be guard number two.

“Taking both of them should definitely slow them down significantly. If we go after them now, we might be able to catch up to them.”

Bertus silently nodded his head to Cliffman’s words.

“We should, but…”

Everyone gazed towards the jungle drenched in darkness, which made it difficult to enter. Would we be able to dive into that dark void of trees and catch the kidnappers? It was rather clear that we wouldn’t be able to see a single thing, and it was highly likely that we’d fall into danger again.

“I can use light magic.”

Adelia was abducted right in front of her nose, so Harriet stepped forward, seemingly trying to somehow press down her fears. Bertus looked at her and nodded.

“Okay. Then let’s go right away.”

Ellen and Cliffman—who had had the highest fighting power—took machetes while Bertus, Liana, and I each took a javelin.

“It might be more dangerous to stay in the camp. Everyone, you should come with us. And take everything you can with you, including the small knives.”

Everyone nodded at Bertus’s words.

If we were successful, we could soon be released from that hell mission.

We could recover our two kidnapped classmates and leave that damn deserted island.

It was a rather rare opportunity.

* * *

The jungle at midnight was terrifyingly dark.

– *Float… Float…*

Harriet, who was at the forefront, summoned a sphere of light to illuminate our way, and Ellen and Cliffman walked beside her as if they were her bodyguards.

Bertus and Kono Lint walked in the center while Liana, Heinrich, and I walked in the rear. Heinrich also lit some wood to use as a torch, maintaining it with his power.

Both the vanguard and the rearguard had their own means of illumination.

“There are some footprints left behind.”

“Where? Let me see.”

Ellen was able to locate footprints the raiders left behind as the rain had stopped.

Bertus wrinkled his eyebrows when he saw them.

“Is that right…? If so, they should be giants.”

Judging by the size of their footprints, it was clear that the kidnappers were giants of considerable height. Even if they took two kids, they were simply able to put them on their shoulders like that.

“Okay, let’s keep following these traces.”

If we followed those footprints, we’d be able to catch the raiders. Everyone felt extremely nervous because it might lead to a battle.

“I-is it… Is it really… going to be okay?”

Kono Lint expressed his doubts, wondering if this was really part of the test. The rest of us also had similar thoughts.

Was this really part of the test? What were the teachers even doing? Actually, wasn’t this real?

Even these doubts and fears were part of this group mission. I saw these kids right in front of me being tortured like that. That made me wonder if this was really okay for just an exam.

However, waiting around would be even worse.

Everyone moved forward with heightened vigilance, staying completely quiet—they momentarily forgot their excruciating fatigue because of the eerie tension.

After we walked for a while, the vanguard suddenly stopped.

“There’s something over there.”

Everyone held their breath at those words. There was the faint glow of light coming from the place Ellen pointed at.

“What’s going on?”

“Shouldn’t we follow them?”

During that brief exchange of opinions, the distant light began to approach us.

Soon, we found out who they were; someone appeared before us—running through the jungle like the wind.

“Are you guys also searching for them?”

It was Delphine Izadra.

* * *

It wasn’t only us who searched through the jungle in the middle of the night; Class B was doing the same as well. That was our first proper meet-up ever since the group mission started. A few of us were missing, though.

Class A and B gathered in one place. So, Charlotte and Bertus started to talk to each other as they both wanted to quickly resolve this situation, although this couldn’t be called cooperation.

“Two people were abducted?”

“Yes.”

Charlotte and Bertus were talking with each other as our representatives while the rest of us warily watched our surroundings.

It was a competitive mission, but both of them were mentally exhausted. Focusing on winning was good and all, but it seemed that both Charlotte and Bertus just wanted to get the mission over with as quickly as possible, so they even shared their information with each other.

“Lanian and Christina got kidnapped on our side.”

Both sides had lost a person on the previous day and had lost two more on that night. Each class had eight people remaining. Bertus folded his arms and stared into the dark jungle.

“This time, I’m pretty sure there isn’t just one raider…”

It was impossible to attack both camps at the same time like they had if there was

just one. Bertus seemed to think that there were at least two of them. Charlotte agreed to Bertus' guess.

"There are actually more than one."

"…Did you check?"

"We were a little further ahead. We found traces going in different directions."

Because they had Delphine, who was good at hunting and tracking, Class B moved a lot faster than us and was able to gather more information.

"Since we're here now, let's follow one trail each."

Two trails.

Charlotte suggested that Class A and B should follow one each, and Bertus agreed.

One trail led to the middle of the island, and the other trail seemed to lead to the other side of the island. Charlotte gave Bertus the right to choose first—he chose to follow the trail leading to the middle of the island.

"By the way, if the condition is catching both of the raiders, what will happen when we catch one each?" Liana said curiously, meaning to say that there was no way for both our classes to be victorious.

"Since we'll get additional points, I think they'll probably evaluate the other parts as well. Rather, if we absolutely have to catch both… That would be a headache…"

If we had to catch both of them to finish the mission, things would be difficult. Bertus seemed troubled by that thought.

It was nighttime and, no matter how bright a light we had with us, our view was still limited. Class B had Delphine; due to her tracking background, she would be able to move a little faster than us.

We were able to hear various howls of beasts in the nighttime jungle.

-Rustle!

“Wh-what was that?!”

The kids were so anxious that they jumped at every rustle of a bush. I wasn’t much different, though.

Cold sweat was trickling down everyone’s faces and necks.

“Nocturnal animals might end up attacking us suddenly. Stay vigilant.”

It had also been confirmed that there were large cats and other wild beasts in the jungle. There was the possibility that we might get attacked by such a wild beast, apart from the raiders.

Everyone seemed to have only just realized how crazy it was to enter such a thick jungle at night.

-*Splaaaash!*

“The stream…”

Soon, we reached the stream we had discovered the other day.

“I think they crossed over.”

As Ellen said, the trail cut off at the stream. However, due to the recent heavy rain, the stream was almost overflowing.

“How can we get over there?”

With the stream as it was, it wasn’t possible to jump over it, so Bertus was posing that question. If it was just us, we’d be swept away the moment we set foot in the stream.

But it seemed rather obvious that the raiders somehow crossed the stream.

“Th-there… Can we use those, maybe?”

Kono Lint put down the bundle of rope he had slung over his shoulder.

“Oh… Right, we had that. Okay. Well done for bringing it with you.”

Following Bertus's instruction,.Kono Lint brought whatever he could carry. Honestly, that guy probably didn't think it would be of much help, but he couldn't just leave it in the camp, so he brought it with him—it had actually turned out to be quite helpful for us.

"If we tie this to a tree on the other side and this side, I think we can somehow cross the stream…"

Of course, everyone had that thought floating in their heads.

"How do we get it to the other side, though?"

However, that didn't change the fact that we had to take one end of the rope to the other side. Bertus looked at Ellen.

"Ellen, do you think you can jump across the river?"

"No."

When Ellen said it was impossible for her to leap across a river of such breadth, Bertus just nodded, saying, "Is that so?". Anyway, we somehow had to cross over to get one end of the rope to the other side.

Wait, there was a way.

"If we tie the rope to something like a rock and throw it over there, we could send it over to the other side."

Bertus nodded after listening to my explanation.

"…We could do that. We can send it to the other side like that, but we won't be able to tie it to a tree. In the end, one of us has to cross the river to tie…"

Bertus suddenly closed his mouth as if he had just realized something.

It wasn't just Bertus.

There was only one person that could cross the river safely. Everyone wordlessly stared at Kono Lint.

It was possible for him.

“Ex… Excuse me? G-guys…? M-me… Why me?”

Bertus put a hand on Kono Lint’s shoulder.

“We believe in you. Lint.”

Kono Lint didn’t have the guts to refuse Bertus’s gentle coercion.

* * *

The plan proceeded without a hitch, with all the female students covering their eyes, not looking across the stream. Kono Lint teleported to the other side. Naked, obviously. Cliffman tied one end of the rope to a rock and threw it over, then Kono Lint hurriedly tied it to a nearby tree.

After that, with both ends of the rope tightly tied to trees on both sides, I crossed the river, handing him his clothes.

“Wha-what is it…”

“You really can do this anywhere, huh?.”

At my words, Kono Lint shouted with his face tomato red.

“I didn’t want to do this!”

Still, Kono Lint’s ability was quite useful during the mission. Just by giving up his dignity, he would have no equal among the supernatural power users.

“Ooh! Now we can cross the river!”

Terrifyingly powerful torrents were raging below, and they had to rely on that single rope to go across. Of course, all those that had no combat-related talents were rather reluctant.

Harriet shivered, looking like she would absolutely refuse to do it, her face particularly pale.

It was Ellen who came after me, then Cliffman tried to cross over. By the time he climbed about halfway across, Ellen, Kono Lint, and I could see it.

Something was approaching our party from behind.

“Tha-that… That. What is that…?”

Kono Lint muttered as his complexion grew ashen.

“Run away! “

Ellen shouted.

“Run away, you fucking idiots!”

Only after my shout was added did they turn around to look behind them.

Something was approaching the kids, its eyes shining red in the darkness.

The others living on that island.

Bertus looked at the approaching giant and muttered blankly.

“They weren’t… humans…?”

What came after us wasn’t human.

“Roooooooaaaar!”

It had green skin and red eyes.

“Gaaaaaaah!”

With the appearance of the orcs, the kids began to run away, scared to death.

CHAPTER 104

The orc was neither grabbing them nor attacking them.

-Thud!

It cut the rope with its stone axe, making it impossible for us to climb back or climb over.

"!"

"Cliffman!"

-Splash!

"Urg! Urk!"

Naturally, Cliffman, who was hanging from the rope, fell into the stream and was about to get swept away. Ellen, Kono Lint, and I were isolated on the other side of the stream, and the orc pursued the kids who began running away.

"Wha-what is that?! What is this?! Can they make it?"

Kono Lint seemed to want to deny reality when he saw Cliffman getting swept away by the stream's rapids and a huge orc appearing, chasing the other kids.

The orc.

It was a monster that made a regular appearance in medieval fantasies, and I also set it up to appear in my novel, but seeing it in person gave me goosebumps.

Orcs weren't just ordinary mobs in this world to begin with. Why was a race boasting overwhelming physical strength incomparable to humans deemed as a regular mob?

As I said, I didn't care much about historical accuracy, but because of my strange youthful stubbornness, an orc attacked.

Anyway.

Wasn't it kind of strange seeing a green-skinned Dwayne Johnson roaring at us with a stone axe in his hand?

"What a load of crap…"

I didn't expect it to appear like that, so I had chills running down my spine. Kono Lint muttered in shock, his face as white as a ghost.

"Cliffman…"

"He's out. The teachers will save him."

Because it was more or less confirmed that he'd drown, they probably already rescued him. The button-shaped artifact we were provided with in the beginning was a tool with which we could give up the mission, but it was also a tool that would activate in an emergency, casting a recall spell. Sensing that Cliffman's life was in danger, he must have been summoned to where the teachers were.

In the end, the mission wasn't supposed to be life-threatening. It would just create situations that were rather close to it. The orc was also a puppet that only listened to its summoner's orders. In fact, as soon as the students were in any danger of being killed by that orc's attack, the Recall spell would immediately activate, automatically eliminating them.

But even though I knew all of that, I still felt kind of queasy. I didn't know how many unfamiliar settings had been added.

"If we kill that thing, the mission will be over, right?"

Ellen asked casually.

"…It should be?"

"A-are you going to hunt that thing?"

Kono Lint seemed to be dumbfounded by Ellen's casual words. She was looking at the twinkling light in the distance, fixing her posture with her machete.

“I’m not sure.”

Although it was just a single orc, it still was a monster with a height incomparably taller than an adult man. Because of that, Ellen wasn’t all that confident that she was able to kill that thing.

“We’ll know after we try.”

* * *

The orc was on the other side of the stream, and our weapons were a broken rope, a machete, a javelin, and a knife.

However, our biggest problem wasn’t our weapons.

“How are we supposed to see something…”

Kono Lint was right. We didn’t have the most important thing, a light source, anymore. Harriet, Heinrich, and Liana, who could create one, were all on the other side.

We had no light, and we had to somehow cross the river to face that orc.

“If you connect the rope again, we can cross over to the other side.”

“A-are you serious? Are you really planning on crossing that river?”

Kono Lint was startled by my words.

The rope was cut, but the part that got cut off on the other side wasn’t that long. The rope’s slack was enough to just reconnect the two pieces.

“If you don’t want to go over, then stay here.”

In the end, although he said that he’d never do that again, he still used his teleportation. While Ellen turned away, Kono Lint tied the rope I threw over again. We could hear screams of kids and the orc’s roars echoing from the jungle.

I delivered Kono Lint’s clothes. After he got dressed, Ellen came over.

“Let’s go.”

We couldn’t walk that fast because of the darkness, but we started going in the direction from which we heard the screams. Ellen walked in the front, carefully checking the path ahead, Kono Lint walked in the middle, and I walked in the back.

“N-no matter how I think about it, this isn’t possible…”

Kono Lint trembled, saying that he thought that it wasn’t a good idea.

No matter how I thought about it, the past me must have been a psycho. How could I make high school students go through something like that? They’d get mental scars that would last for a lifetime.

-Roooooooaaaaar!

-Gyaaaaaa!

Hearing those roars and screams from afar made me even more convinced that I had been completely crazy.

* * *

The students of Class A fled, and while fleeing, Heinrich’s feet got caught in a vine, and he ‘died’. The orc that was chasing after them attacked Heinrich immediately. He then disappeared—covered in the halo of the recall spell. That reassured the kids a bit. It was part of the mission, and it reminded them of the fact that even if they were attacked by that thing, they wouldn’t actually die—they would just get eliminated.

There were only three left.

Bertus, Liana, and Harriet.

“Saint-Owan! Can you use attack magic?”

“I-I can, but I don’t think I’ll be able to cast now!”

She needed to focus her mind to use magic, but that wasn’t possible at the moment. It was difficult enough to focus on running away.

-Roooooaaaaar!

-Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam!

The orc no longer tried to move around secretly, chasing the kids while roaring.

Bertus ran with his teeth clenched. It was merely a setting for this mission, but there was no way humans could live peacefully in a place filled with beasts.

He had been complacent in thinking that the others were just really tall humans after seeing those big footprints.

If one were to think about it more deeply, the situation of them getting chased around by an orc happened because they ignored the clues they should have noticed.

'That guy is intelligent.'

The orc had been raiding the camps and had aimed for the moment the party split up to cross the river. It even cut the rope while someone was hanging on it, leading to Cliffman crashing into the violent torrent.

This monster shouldn't be mistaken for a simple mindless beast.

"Grantz! Can you beat it with a lightning bolt?"

"I don't know!"

Harriet could use magic, but it was difficult for her to concentrate in that situation, and—although Grantz could activate her lightning ability quite quickly—it was hard to say if she could actually beat the orc with it.

Cliffman got swept away by the river, and his machete had been swept away with him; they only had Bertus' and Grantz's two javelins.

Bertus had also been trained in combat, although not to the degree Cliffman and Ellen had been. Since he was the only one with a combat talent at the moment, he knew that it was up to him to face the orc.

-Roooooaaaar!

“I think it’s catching up!”

Harriet’s desperate cry implied that the chase was about to come to an end.

“Grantz! I’m going to face it, so try and see if you can hit it with your lightning while I’m at it!”

“Understood!”

“Saint-Owan, although it might be difficult for you, try to prepare your attack magic. Try to focus.”

“I-I’ll try!”

“Try to climb up on something like a tree. It might try to attack you.”

“Ye-yes…”

This was all or nothing.

‘I should have had Ellen with me. Or even Reinhardt.’

Not knowing what choice the guys who crossed the river made, Bertus could only fight the orc with only three of them.

If Liana struck the orc with her lightning while Bertus bought time, they might be able to hunt down the orc. If the lightning didn’t work, Harriet would attack it with her magic.

Defeat didn’t mean death.

-Thud… Thud…

However, when faced with a towering orc of more than 2 meters packed with such huge muscles that they seemed to be about to explode, those that gave up running away from it had no other choice but to believe they’d die.

“This mission probably exists to determine if one would give up when faced with extreme fear, even if it’s just an artificial situation. If one succumbed to it in this situation, one would be even more useless in an actual emergency; it should also test

one's teamwork and leadership."

He somewhat knew what intentions lay behind the mission.

But knowing that wouldn't make the use of this giant green monster any more reasonable. Even if that violent strength was just something artificial, sometimes that was the only thing one would perceive.

It was a monster they only saw in textbooks, one of the more common demons. It was said that they were all killed after the Demon World War.

The humans fought a war with an army consisting of such monsters and won. Even monsters that were several times more dangerous got killed off and beaten. As such, the humans were victorious.

And those humans, who rose to the most dignified positions of the Empire, couldn't afford to be beaten by just a single orc, let alone by one that was presumed to only be a summon.

The students were allowed to lose, however. They were still young, after all.

"Grrrrrrrrrr…"

"Huu…"

Still, they should not be afraid, though.

Those who want to inherit the throne should not be afraid of such things.

"Come at me, monster."

Bertus pointed his javelin at the orc.

* * *

-Flash! Flash!

-Roooooaaaaaar!

"I think they're fighting."

-Boom! Boom!

Along with the sound of the orc running rampant, we could see some flashes of lightning from time to time in the distance. Ellen and I sped up our steps. What the hell was going on?

Heinrich wouldn't be able to use his ability in a real battle as he was, so the ones fighting had to be Bertus and Liana. Harriet probably wouldn't be able to calmly use magic either.

As we came closer, I could somewhat understand what was going on—even though they were still pretty far away.

There was literally a desperate battle going on over there.

-Crack!

* * *

"Kuuak!"

After the orc got hit by Liana's lightning bolt, it frowned and took a few steps back. Her lightning was definitely effective, but it wasn't effective enough to kill the orc.

A javelin was already stabbed into the orc's abdomen, while Bertus parried the orc's charge with the javelin he had received from Liana. Just how the heck did Bertus endure all that? His body was completely torn.

He couldn't have had enough strength to fight with that thing head-on, so he should have done whatever it took to dodge its attack and roll on the floor.

Lightning did some damage, but all it did was make it stagger for a bit, and javelins didn't seem to be able to deal lethal damage to the orc.

" Kuaaaaaaaaah!"

The orc ran towards Bertus with its stone axe; Bertus tried to dodge it by turning to his side, not trying to stab out with his javelin.

And then—

-Bam!

“Thi-this…!”

—Bertus’s foot got caught on one of the many vines covering the floor, then he lost his balance and fell. It was a mistake that could only happen in a state where one’s view wasn’t clear.

The orc’s axe slammed down on Bertus’ head.

“Bertus!”

-Flash!

With a flash of light, Bertus’ body completely disappeared.

Bertus was eliminated.

“Roooooooaaaaaaaar!”

The orc, roaring as if celebrating its victory, rushed towards Liana next.

-Crack!

“Kwok!”

However, Liana calmly defended against its rush with a lightning strike, pushing him away with her electricity as soon as the orc came into her range.

After learning that Liana would keep attacking it with electricity, the orc didn’t try to get closer to her anymore.

The orc changed its tactics.

It raised its axe and threw it towards Liana with all its might.

“!”

It was thrown at such a fierce speed that Liana didn’t even have time to react to it, so her body was also immediately covered in light and disappeared.

Two of them got eliminated right before my eyes.

Harriet, who somehow managed to climb on a tree, was the only one left. The orc retrieved its axe and tried throwing it towards Harriet next.

“Ah…”

Harriet’s face turned completely white when she saw the axe pointed at her.

Then, the moment it threw the axe.

-Kangg!

Ellen appeared, accurately knocking the flying axe from the air.

* * *

In the island survival arc, I had tried to showcase two things.

One: the students of Class A were actually pretty difficult to work with because many of them were just too whiny, while Class B’s students, although not as talented, did what they needed to do without complaining and were highly motivated, so Class B was actually better than Class A.

And two—

“Roooaaar!”

“Hap!”

-Swoosh!

“Kwak!”

—Ellen Artorius was the only one from Class A that didn’t give up.

By showing Ellen hunting an orc alone, I had been trying to show that she was incomparably stronger than her classmates.

In the island arc, Ellen was shown to be someone important for the first time.

In the original, everyone of Class A—except for one—voluntarily gave up, while none of Class B's students chose to give up.

Although Class B was the one who won the group mission in the end, only Ellen managed to fulfill the special condition.

That special condition was…

Hunting an orc.

-Kagak!

-Swoosh!

"Hup!"

-Kang!

Of course, she got overwhelmingly pushed back in terms of power. However, Ellen was gradually adding wounds to the creature's flesh as she ran around and dodged its attacks. The machete wasn't suitable for stabbing, and the orc's hard body wasn't easily wounded.

Compared to its huge body, the wounds added to it seemed like mere scratches. However, it was apparent that the damage on its body was slowly accumulating while Ellen parried or avoided all of its attacks. It was to the point where one could call it bullying.

I could only stare blankly at Ellen, who was fighting to the best of her abilities with such strange movements.

However, that wasn't the time to just watch.

Of course, it would be difficult to approach it to fight. If I stepped in for no reason, I would only get in Ellen's way.

"Hup!"

While strengthening my body, I threw a stone at the back of the orc's head.

-Pok!

“Rooooaaaar!”

The orc looked back at me and roared; Ellen didn’t miss that chance and slashed at its back with her machete.

-Poc!

“Kuaaak!!”

It got attacked from both the front and the back, so it tried to put both me and Ellen in its field of view. The fact that it was struggling against such small ants was already enough to royally piss it off.

The orc, whose body seemed to have become tired, looked as if it thought about whether it should first deal with Ellen or me. Ellen was the more dangerous opponent, but was it really not able to ignore her for a moment to get rid of me?

Although I knew I wouldn’t die, I couldn’t help but feel a chill running through my body.

“Rooaaaaaar!”

The orc rushed at me; I then turned sideways to let it run past me.

-Bang!

It swung its stone axe but only hit a tree. However, it sure was terrifying seeing that large tree getting cut in half by that stone axe.

It was like an unstoppable force. Ellen rushed towards the rebounding orc, to which the orc reacted with a vertical slash of its stone axe.

-Boom!

Ellen avoided the axe, letting it smash the ground, then she grabbed the javelin stuck in the orc’s abdomen. It probably was Bertus who had embedded it into it.

-Pull!

“Kuwaaah!”

Elle pulled out the javelin from its giant body and then stabbed it towards the orc’s eyes without any delay.

-Squish!

“Kuwaaaaaaaaah!”

Her movements were intricately connected, making it look as if she was dancing. There were no unnecessary movements, they flowed like water, and the orc had no chance to even react.

After having one of its eyes neutralized, the orc staggered and began to step back. Without giving me a chance to step in, Ellen almost defeated the orc on her own.

And—

“I-it’s working…”

—a faint exclamation sounded from somewhere.

-Rumble!

And following that exhausted shout, a more threatening sound could be heard. The jungle was tinged in red in an instant. I looked behind me and saw a big fireball burning next to Harriet’s face, who still sat awkwardly on that tree.

“Grrr.”

“I’m going to pay back everything it did to us!”

The orc, whose eye got hurt, began to step back, but Harriet—who had already finished casting her magic—was faster.

-Siiiizzle!

Both me and Ellen threw ourselves backward, getting away from the orc at the same time.

Soon—

-Kuwaaaah Babaaaaaang!

—the sound of a roar and an explosion engulfed the jungle.

* * *

I set fireball up to be a spell comparable in performance to an anti-tank rocket if put in modern terms.

-Jiiiiiiiing!

The explosion was so loud that I could hear a ringing in my ears.

So it was only natural that the orc, which got directly hit by that, was completely torn apart. Harriet, who had cast that spell, lost her balance from the aftershock of the explosion and stumbled from the tree she had climbed.

“U-urg! Aaah!”

If we didn’t do something, she might get eliminated because she fell down from a great height right after killing the orc. The distance between us was too great for me to catch her.

I immediately called out to Kono Lint, who was rather far away from me.

“Hey! Catch her!”

“Wha-what?!”

“Catch her, you idiot!”

At my urgent shout, Kono Lint seemed to be struggling between keeping his dignity or saving his classmate; however, soon he teleported several times and caught Harriet mid-fall before landing softly.

Naked, of course.

“Tha-thank y-… Hieeeeek!”

“I-I couldn’t help it!”

Harriet was surprised that someone caught her and then was shocked that it was the naked Kono Lint.

He put Harriet on the floor and then disappeared, teleporting several times again. He looked extremely embarrassed.

Just how many times would he have to get naked and put on his clothes again that day?

A puzzled expression on her face, Harriet alternated looking between Ellen and me. Soon, her face twisted up, then she crawled towards me and hugged me recklessly.

“Hi-hick! Sob! I-I was so scared, so so scared! Hihick! Sob, sob!”

Now that the tension was gone, Harriet clung to me and started crying. While she was casting the fireball spell, she probably didn’t even know how she actually managed to do that.

Also, the one who saved her was Kono Lint; why was she clinging to me? Wouldn’t he be very upset if he knew what was going on?

What should I do?

I thought I might have demanded a bit much of her during the mission.

“What’s there to be scared of after you completely tore it apart? You did a hella good job.”

“Waaaaaaaaaaaah!”

I patted Harriet on the back while she was crying bitterly.

In the original, it was Ellen who hunted the orc. Of course, Ellen still landed a critical hit.

However, Harriet, who gave up immediately in the original, showed great performance while fighting the orc.

CHAPTER 105

Four students of Class A survived.

Ellen, Harriet, Kono Lint, and me.

After getting exposed to a great amount of fear and stress and using high-tier attack magic—somehow maintaining focus—Harriet almost immediately fell asleep, seeming as if she fainted.

I returned to the camp carrying the sleeping Harriet on my back. Then, after laying her down in one of the huts, I went to the campfire.

The fire was extinguished, but it was already dawn, the sky was getting brighter.

"…Isn't the mission supposed to be over with this?"

We found out that the others weren't actually humans but orcs, and we killed one. Kono Lint made the hopeful connection that the mission should be over.

"There might be one more left."

"Tha-that's…"

There were two targets. If the trail Class B followed also led to an orc, the correct answer would have been that there were two orcs.

"Then, do you mean we have to go out and hunt that other orc as well?"

"If Class B managed to kill that orc, the mission would be over."

But there was the problem.

Class B didn't have the ability to actually fight an orc.

So originally, they would just be chased around by the orc, getting eliminated one by one, leaving only Ludwig and Delphine, then Ellen would dramatically appear and

block the orc.

In the original, Ellen had already hunted the other orc by herself, and she also killed the remaining one on her own as well. At that moment, seeing Ellen displaying her skills for the first time, Ludwig started growing… Because Ellen was right in front of me, that probably wouldn't happen.

While Class B would self-destruct while trying to fight the orc, Ellen was sitting next to me, staring blankly into the sky.

What should I do?

I would have liked to help Charlotte, but for that, Ellen had to step in, not me. Although it seemed that she'd come along if I asked her. That was what she was like.

"H-huh… Wha-what is this?"

Suddenly all of our artifacts began to light up.

-Flash!

And, with a flash, we were all transported somewhere.

After the recall artifact suddenly triggered, we landed on the shores of a different island, similar to the one we were on before.

The only difference was that there were a lot of bungalows one could only find in a resort built near the beach.

"The special mission has been completed. As such, the group mission will now end."

Standing in front of us were Mr. Epinhauser and Mr. Mustrang. Harriet seemed more surprised than us because she had been transported all of a sudden while she was asleep.

The sky gradually brightened.

* * *

"Class A had a total of four survivors and killed the orc. The student who killed it was

A-5 Harriet de Saint-Owan."

Mr. Epinhauser looked towards Class B.

"Class B had one survivor and killed the orc. The student who killed it was B-1 Charlotte de Gardias."

Charlotte frowned as if she wasn't happy with the result, crossing her arms.

There was only one survivor in Class B, and Charlotte was the one who killed the orc.

There were so many implications coming with that simple result that I couldn't help but be a little dazed.

Since Charlotte wouldn't have been able to hunt the orc using a weapon, she must have used her supernatural power. Although it was not known what kind of power Charlotte held, that confirmed that it could be said that it was strong enough for her to kill an orc on her own.

Originally, Ellen was supposed to kill both, but although the rest of Class B didn't manage to kill one, there was the variable, Charlotte, who actually killed an orc.

"We will inform you of the overall results of the mission and who won at a later date. Go rest for now."

After telling us to use the bungalow found at the back, Mr. Epinhauser walked away. Blunt as usual.

"You guys have been through a lot. Take a good rest today."

Mr. Mustrang guided us to the bungalow, telling us to rest regardless of class.

The group mission was over.

[Quest completed.]

[You have earned 1000 achievement points.]

My strongest desire at that moment was to go to sleep, disregarding the points I earned.

* * *

The ones that got eliminated first had been summoned there as well by the recall magic and had to wait until the mission was over.

Although they had to wait, it was a place completely different from the wilderness we stayed in before; it was decorated like a resort.

The island was shaped like a crescent moon.

The bay-type beach was calm and perfect for swimming, and we were served proper food and fully equipped accommodations—completely different from the rough housings and food we'd eaten thus far.

After the mission was over, we had time to play in that place for the whole weekend.

Therefore, in a way, the ones who were eliminated first had it quite good.

I fell asleep as soon as I lay down and woke up around noon. Of course, they prepared a new set of clothes for me, so I changed out of all my clothes, from my underwear to my coat.

I could see Ludwig and the other guys from Class B playing on the beach. The only thing that was different before was that they were wearing proper swimwear.

"Hey, Reinhardt."

"Hey."

Bertus, dressed in comfortable clothes, looked at me and raised his hand. He held a cup filled with a lemon-flavored smoothie in his right hand. I, too, was lying on a sunbed, absentmindedly sipping at a fruit punch.

I didn't really like sweets but sometimes I craved them—especially after going through something like that. I was replenishing calories.

I just completely spaced out because something cool went down my throat while I was that mentally exhausted.

The way Bertus looked seemed like a wealthy, handsome young master.

He collapsed on the sunbed next to me and burst into laughter.

“If I knew things would end up like this after giving up, I would have done that sooner.”

“That’s right.”

It seemed that Bertus found it rather ridiculous that the ones who got eliminated the earliest got to live the high life while he was working his butt off. Of course, those who had survived the longest would get a higher individual score, so if one cared about their grades, it would be the best to survive until the very end.

He sighed as he laid down on the sunbed next to me.

“It’s like heaven because we are now supported by our environment.”

When I thought of the place as an uninhabited island, I was so sick of it and wanted to leave as soon as possible, but now that the place was properly equipped with the required facilities, I could finally enjoy the scenery; it was an outrageously beautiful place.

"But I sure hope I won’t have to do anything similar to this in the future.”

“I wholeheartedly agree."

It felt even more terrible because I had to experience all the dog shit I wrote myself. How could I have made kids go through an episode of Law of the Jungle? It was even more amazing how I managed to sleep peacefully after doing that.

Anyway, the group mission ended on Thursday morning, earlier than the originally scheduled Friday evening. We could spend our weekend and the remaining time at that jewel-like beach.

In other words, that was the start of our real trip. Bertus got up from the sunbed, looked down at me, and laughed.

“Anyway, you did a great job, Reinhardt. Tell Ellen and Saint-Owan the same. It seems that both of them are sleeping.”

“Okay. You suffered a lot as well.”

Ever since I took the initiative and told him that we had to do something, Bertus led the kids. It was true that he had to suffer through a lot—he even had to face an orc on his own.

I made eye contact with Liana, who was lying calmly in the sunbed to my other side, sipping on her drink.

"You went through a lot as well."

Liana nodded her head to my rough praise while lying.

“You too.”

What was that?

Was it a stretch to think that the group mission created some form of camaraderie among the Class A students?

That reminded me again that if we were to go through school together, there was a possibility that a unique bond might form between us.

* * *

As the day advanced past noon, the dead asleep people also started to wake up.

“Urg… My whole body is aching. I think I’m going to die.”

“A-are you okay?”

“No… What about you, Adelia?”

“I-I just… After I got taken, I just ended up here… I was scared and surprised, but I wasn’t hurt.”

“That’s a relief… Let’s go eat something."

“Yeah. There’s a restaurant over there.”

“I’m finally getting something proper to eat…”

Harriet came out with an empty expression on her face and then headed towards the restaurant together with Adelia; it seemed like she was physically as well as mentally exhausted because of the spell she cast in the jungle in the middle of the night.

When she walked past me to get to the restaurant, Harriet met my eyes.

“Are you okay?"

“…Yeah.”

She avoided my gaze for some reason.

After reaching a safe environment, she might have recalled many things, like how she hugged me and cried while whining to me.

It seemed like she came to her senses after she entered a safe zone and remembered how she relied on me when she had a mental breakdown.

Wha-what have I done? Just what did I say? I must have gone crazy! That just had to be it!

It seemed like that was what she was thinking.

She’d probably be that way for a while.

-Reinhardt, won’t you come swimming as well?

In the distance, I could see Ludwig, who was playing with the other boys up until then, beckoning me to come over. Since the mission was over, these guys were frolicking about just because.

“I’m sick and tired of swimming, you bastard!”

-Is that so? Then there’s nothing we can do about that!

Were those guys actually crazy? How could they keep on playing like that?

-Puhak!

And I could see a girl in a swimsuit splashing around in the sea outside the bay far

off in the distance.

That girl.

Ellen shook her head for a while and eventually returned with some lobsters skewered on a javelin. She trotted over to me in her swimsuit and pointed the spear—and the large lobster—towards me.

“Let’s eat this.”

“…Again?”

It was a little surprising that she asked to eat together with me.

Did she really want to eat that again?

* * *

The restaurant.

The children ate different types of food and a lot of them; only Ellen went ahead and caught another lobster for herself.

She only wore one of her training suit jackets over her swimsuit. In fact, there were quite a lot of students only wearing their swimsuits to eat.

“…Do you really want to eat that again?”

“I want to eat it properly cooked.”

That girl seemed to wonder what the giant lobster would taste like if it were properly cooked, so that was why she handed the lobster over to the restaurant staff at the time.

All the staff there were people who worked at Temple. So if the chef of that place was the same person that made our dinners, then they were definitely skilled.

Of course, Ellen didn’t want to only eat lobster. She already stuffed fried rice, sausages, and pasta into her mouth. She ate even more than usual because she couldn’t properly fill her stomach for the last few days.

Soon, lobster grilled in garlic butter with gratin on the side got brought to our table.

When I tried that properly cooked version, it tasted even better.

It was only natural that the eyes of the students who were stuffing themselves with various dishes in the restaurant crowded over to us because of the delicious fragrance.

However, there was only a single lobster dish as Ellen hunted it herself.

“You can eat some.”

When I said that, Harriet, Liana, Adelia, and Bertus came over and tasted some of it.

“It’s okay.”

“I might be sick and tired of this, but it certainly is still very delicious.”

Everyone said that the cooked version of the lobster was even more delicious.

“I do like it, but I think the one we had on the first day was a lot better…”

Harriet seemed to remember the lobster she ate on the first day to have tasted even more delicious because she didn’t expect it to taste good. It was a psychological thing. Seeming as if she really hated remembering that time, her face turned really red.

Those factors couldn’t be ignored either.

The guys from Class B also came closer and asked Ellen if they could eat some of it. They even took turns tasting a bite.

"Did you learn how to share your food now?"

"I can just catch more."

"Oh, is that so?"

It was a rather simple way of thinking. If there wasn’t enough, she could just catch more.

I thought I wouldn't be able to eat lobster for a while, but when I put it in my mouth, it was so delicious that I ate quite a bit of it.

Then I remembered something I had completely forgotten.

"Ah, the leather!"

"Oh."

Ellen seemed to have only recalled it at that moment.

* * *

After dinner, Ellen and I went to Mr. Epinhauser. In the end, he also wanted to enjoy the same things we enjoyed, so he was lying on one of the sunbeds wearing an Aloha shirt.

To be honest, I certainly felt it again at that point.

That the world there was really weird.

There were even things like Aloha shirts. It was like my mind was in a complete mess when I put in these costumes. There were even synthetic fibers. I had no idea how they fabricated them, though.

It was a ridiculous world that could be better described as a mix of modern and contemporary medieval fantasy.

"If it's about that, you can take it back with you. I've been entrusted with processing these things, so you should be able to get it by the time you're back in Temple."

When we asked what happened to the jaguar leather, Mr. Epinhauser gave us a really unexpected answer. The mission was over, so I didn't even know that he had that kind of role.

"Think of it as your spoils of this mission."

Perhaps they left that job to a person who was experienced in handling animals. After selling it, Elle, Delphin, and I would share the money earned between us.

After my hunger was sated, I laid back down on a sunbed, and Ellen laid down on the one next to me.

I felt like I could sleep there for two days.

The pocket money Temple gave us was also quite large, so there was no need to rush to get more money. There was nothing wrong with just relaxing there.

“What are you going to do with the money?"

“Nothing much.”

Ellen also didn’t think that much about it either.

Even if she didn’t say anything, she also must have been very tired, so she immediately fell asleep—only the sound of her steady breathing reached my ears.

She had done a brilliant job without uttering a single complaint or whining. In fact, I saw Ellen getting very exhausted a lot while we were roaming through the jungle.

She had gotten really dirty and sweaty in the jungle, but at that moment, her face and hair were clean and soft.

I put a towel over that sleeping girl's legs and got up. It was a bit sad.

Really.

All it took was a proper place to sleep, something delicious to eat, and fresh clothes to wear that made the most fierce hell into a paradise.

I guess living life wasn’t anything special after all.

-Reinhardt! Come on! It’s fun!

“Are you that crazy about swimming?”

Ludwig had eaten and gone back into the water, making a huge fuss again.

-Pat

“Who cares?”

Suddenly, Bertus approached me from behind and placed his hand on my shoulder.

“Opportunities like that won’t come often, so how about we go and play?”

That reminded me that Bertus never actually went into the sea up until then.

It was the boss’s order, after all.

“Haaa… Alright, let’s go."

I’ll show you just what it means to play in the water.

CHAPTER 106

We went to mess around in the water. As soon as Bertus and I entered the sea, the three incompetent brothers of Class A (Erich, Kono Lint, and Cayer) soon followed us.

Except for Delphin, the only ones other than us who were there were the guys from Class B.

Of course, a little while later, two unexpected people began to approach the water.

“I-I’m… I’m…”

“What’s the matter? Doesn’t it look fun? Let’s go in.”

“I-I’m shy…”

Charlotte, wearing a swimsuit, approached the beach, dragging Scarlett with her. Of course, they wore swimsuits provided by Temple, not bikinis or something—they were just school swimsuits.

Still, all the guy’s eyes turned in their direction momentarily, staring blankly at them. They were obviously great beauties, so it was impossible not to stare.

Erich couldn’t even look in Scarlett’s direction, perhaps because he remembered her beating him up.

“Can we join?”

Charlotte asked us as she was approaching, while Scarlett stood behind her with a red face.

“Sure, Charlotte!”

Ludwig warmly welcomed them, while Bertus just smiled.

As soon as Charlotte came into the water, Bertus poured water over her.

“Kya!”

Charlotte, covered in water, looked at Bertus.

“Why did you do that?”

She stared at him with a chilly look in her eyes.

"This is how you’re supposed to play. How could you be so serious? Really?”

-*Woosh!*

“Arg!"

“Really now? How could you get so serious when we’re just playing? Can’t you let it go? That’s all you can do?”

-*Woosh!*

“Hey! Stop it!”

In the end, some harsh words came out of Charlotte’s mouth.

“Hey, hey, if you came over to play, you should play. How could you get angry? Hahahaha!”

“Aaaarg! You’re crazy!”

Bertus suddenly burst into laughter and continued to splash water on Charlotte, to which she screamed and reciprocated his actions. So they ended up splashing water at each other like crazy.

“Hey, guys, help me!”

“Don’t bother Charlotte!”

Charlotte eventually asked for help, and everyone, including Ludwig and Scarlett, started attacking the Imperial Prince.

“Urgh! Uuurgh!"

The scene wasn't really a brutal one. Bertus didn't pretend to be a good person and openly fought with the Princess. Of course, it was more like a prank, so it was rather fun and didn't make the atmosphere turn sour.

The plot of the earlier parts I had written down had completely changed direction. I didn't know whether that scene could be described as friendly or antagonistic.

Why couldn't those two just get along?

"Guys! I also need some help here!"

Eventually, that crazy prank turned into a class competition.

* * *

The fierce water fight ended with Class B's victory, as they had a larger number of people on their side.

"You're the worst…"

However, due to Bertus relentlessly attacking only Charlotte, she had the advantage, but her eyes and nose were completely red. It seemed like she was made to drink a lot of water through her nose. Of course, Bertus was the same.

"You lost, but you fought well—that's what you're supposed to say."

Bertus spoke while groaning, earning him a glare from Charlotte. Those two were actually after each other's lives, but looking at them like that made them seem like just a pair of siblings that bickered with each other.

Charlotte murmured grimly, giving Bertus a cold stare. Her glare seriously seemed like she could shock freeze someone with it.

"Let's play 'crack the watermelon'. The winner gets to knock the loser on the head."

"What's with that all of a sudden?"

Bertus seemed a little perplexed by Charlotte's casual tone of voice.

It looked like Charlotte really wanted to defeat Bertus completely.

No, how did she know about ‘crack the watermelon’ anyway?

“Are you scared?”

“Ahahahahahaha!”

Bertus burst into laughter at Charlotte’s obvious provocation, then looked down at Charlotte with a grim look in his eyes.

“No way.”

“Bring me a watermelon!”

On their own, Bertus and Charlotte seemed rather kind and sweet.

However, when they were talking with each other, their personalities made a complete 180.

* * *

A watermelon was placed on the sandy beach, and before it, Charlotte and Bertus were facing each other. The one who broke the watermelon first while blindfolded and after spinning ten times would get to hit the loser on the head.

Both their eyes were covered with a towel.

“Th-that… Guys. Isn’t that dangerous?”

Mr. Mustrang seemed anxious when he saw the kids holding a rod trying to crack open a watermelon.

“Whoever manages to crack open the watermelon first after spinning around ten times, wins!”

Ludwig served as the referee. Everyone stood around and watched the sudden watermelon cracking competition, which seemed a little odd but very interesting.

“Okay, let’s start!”

Bertus and Charlotte began to spin around in place.

In fact, the slight hope that they might end up forming a good relationship was nothing but that, a slight hope.

Then, after some time.

-*Whack!*

“Urgh!”

“Ah, I made a mistake.”

Charlotte hit Bertus’ head with her bat and not the watermelon.

Everyone knew that that swing was never supposed to hit the watermelon, as she hit from right to left, not from top to bottom.

As she wandered about, she kept gravitating towards the direction of Bertus’ voice, not towards the watermelon.

“Hey, how could you do this to me?!”

“It was a mistake!”

-*Whack!*

“Urgh!”

“Ah, another mistake.”

Charlotte.

She actually wanted to play ‘crack the head’, not ‘crack the watermelon’.

Bertus ripped off the towel and glared at Charlotte with cold eyes.

“You’re dead."

“It was just a mistake, you know? Are you really going to get mad at me for making a tiny mistake? Wasn’t it you who told me to not take things so seriously while playing around?”

“You did that on purpose!”

In the end, a wild chase ensued between Charlotte and Bertus, who had both taken off the towels. Charlotte, who would obviously fall behind Bertus in physical abilities, got caught with no way of escape.

Bertus, who was seriously pissed off, picked up Charlotte and threw her into the sea.

“Die! Drown and die!”

“You crazy bastaaaard!”

-Splash!

The two ended up laughing at each other’s actions, so everyone also ended up bursting into laughter seeing the scene.

* * *

Their fights couldn’t get any more intense than that because if either of them died, the other would be deprived of their right to the throne.

So in the end, this just seemed like they were quarreling. In fact, the funniest part was that both of them ended up getting mad at each other.

It seemed like the students of Class A and B were able to talk peacefully with each other, although they weren’t on friendly terms just yet. It was totally different from the original, where they would be at each other’s throats at all times.

Evening time.

After dinner, the teachers told us to gather together. As a precaution against parasite infections or something similar, there were wizards and priests casting various types of purification spells on us. Of course, I got a bit nervous, but thanks to Sarkegaar’s ring, I wasn’t exposed or anything.

After the medical check-up, the teachers announced the results of both classes.

“It seems that both Class A and B have fulfilled the special condition. However, there were four final survivors in Class A and only one in Class B. As a result, taking

various other factors into account, the mission ended in Class A's victory."

Additionally…

The arc that should have ended in Class B's victory ended up being Class A's as the plot had gotten completely twisted.

Charlotte didn't end up winning. Mr. Epinhauser put up a piece of paper on the wall on one side of the restaurant.

"Of course, although the students of the winning class receive extra points, that doesn't mean that everyone else got a bad score. Please check the individual evaluation scores recorded on this paper."

Not everyone part of the winning class would get high scores, and not everyone in the losing class would get low scores. Someone who just lazed about wouldn't get a lot of points just because their class won.

That wasn't the end of it.

"In addition, extra merits will be given to individuals who have greatly helped the group or played an important role during this mission. In Class A, that would be Number 1, 2, 5, and 11. In Class B, it would be Number 1, 9, and 11. The reasons are attached to your personal evaluation record."

Merits.

Bertus, Ellen, Harriet, and I got some merits as well as Class B's Charlotte, Delphin, and Ludwig.

It was probably because Bertus worked hard taking on the role of the leader, and Ellen and Harriet played a decisive role in the orc hunt, so it was only obvious that they would receive merits for that, and I probably got some because I worked hard in various ways as well.

The ones from Class B probably received merits for similar reasons.

"Merits will be included in your evaluation record, and the person who receives the highest amount by the end of the semester will be given a special award. Also, keep in mind that merits and demerits can cancel each other out."

If one got demerits for violating the rules or causing accidents, one would be able to get rid of them with one's merits. For example, they could give one temporary immunity. Of course, everything would be reset after the semester ended.

Anyway, although Class B lost, Charlotte should have received a pretty high score. I didn't know how, but she ended up completing the orc hunt on her own.

While Mr. Epinhauser was explaining one thing after the other, Mr. Mustrang handed out notes to the sitting students one by one.

"Lastly, write down who you think played the biggest role in this mission from each class."

Finally, only the MVP vote remained.

I was deliberating whether I should put down Ellen or Harriet, but in the end, I wrote down Harriet.

I thought about writing down my name for a second, but after thinking about it, I felt like I really went crazy, so I refrained from that.

Class A's voting results were: 2 votes for Bertus, 2 for Ellen, 4 for Harriet, and 3 for me.

Class B's voting results were: 6 votes for Charlotte, 3 for Delphine, and 2 for Ludwig.

Like that, Harriet and Charlotte were voted as the MVPs.

"Me… Me? W-why?"

Harriet's face turned bright red as she probably hadn't even suspected that she'd get elected.

* * *

The MVPs would be given one credit each, so both Harriet and Charlotte would receive credits from the group mission.

At night, the students from Class B suddenly made a campfire for some reason. The guys from Class A didn't seem to understand why they would make merry around a

campfire after they had to sit around one every day before.

However, Lanian Sessor played his instrument and sang some songs, so it wasn't all that bad.

Most of Class A's students were extremely exhausted and opted to enter their bungalows and sleep early.

"Don't those guys ever get tired?" Harriet muttered as she dumbfoundedly watched that scene. When we were on that uninhabited island, their tension was already out of this world, but somehow they got even more excited after they were told to rest.

"Ain't it fine?"

I was lying on a sunbed while watching them, and Harriet was sitting on the sunbed next to me.

"Anyway, if you have something to say to me, say it."

"Wha-what?! Wha-what would I even have to say to you…"

Even at night, I could very clearly see Harriet blushing.

"That's not it."

"…"

I was lying still while she got a bit closer to me. She sat down next to me, neither moving nor saying anything properly, she was just mumbling for some time. I was looking forward to what she had to say to me.

Finally, after muttering for a while, she properly opened her mouth.

"Well… Tha-tha-tha… Thank you."

Was she fumbling about just to say that? Apparently, she wanted to thank me for taking care of her during that mission.

Of course, I ended up grinning at her.

“Hehe. really?”

“…Why are you laughing?”

“Specifically, what are you thankful to me for?”

“Wha-what?”

“You said ‘Thank you’, so tell me what you said thank you for?”

When I jumped up, asking her that with a smile, she slowly pulled back.

“So? What are you so thankful for? Huh? Let’s hear it.”

Harriet frowned when I suddenly entered my teasing mode.

“Aaarg! I hate you! You’re the worst!”

“I see, so why did you say thank you to me then?”

“Go away!”

Her face turned even redder before she yelled at me and ran to her bungalow.

* * *

It was a pretty long break. In Temple, I only trained and trained some more almost every single day, so it had been a very long time since I had a moment where I could just let go of everything and laze about.

During the mission, I had to endure a lot as well, more than just training, so that felt like a long-needed vacation in a way.

Ellen asked Harriet to cast underwater breathing magic on her, as she found it rather fun exploring the underwater world with it.

“…Is it that fun?”

“Yes.”

Harriet sent her off, then cast the spell on herself and went out to the sea with Adelia. After returning from her trip, I could see them excitedly chatting with each other. Perhaps it was a very interesting experience for them.

As I said, it had been a while since I had an actual break, so I was just stretching out and relaxing on the sunbed except when I had to eat. When I got back to Temple, I would have to go back to my tight schedule filled with training. I wouldn't get a day off any time soon after that.

So I was resting with all my might.

Except for eating and sleeping, I just kept on hanging out.

"…Are you a mollusk?"

After staying in that state until Sunday, Charlotte approached me.

"Hm? Why?"

"No, it's just because you've been barely moving since yesterday."

It seemed like what I did looked quite strange to her as I was only hanging around the sunbed as if I was bound to it.

"I have to work hard again when I get back, so I'm trying to rest the best I can for now."

"Hah, that's funny."

Charlotte had her pretty blonde hair tied in a ponytail. Her hair was thick, so it looked good in any hairstyle. She wore a white sleeveless dress, seeming as if she didn't plan on swimming. She sat next to me, sipping on her drink.

Charlotte hunted an orc. Her supernatural power was a secret, but it seemed like it was powerful enough to kill an orc.

However, after the mission ended, Charlotte seemed to be dissatisfied about something.

"Did you kill the orc on your own?"

Charlotte seemed a bit dazed after hearing my question but nodded after some time.

“How I did it is a secret, but I did.”

All of Class B got eliminated one after the other. The mission ended with the only survivor remaining, Charlotte, killing the orc.

“Why are you asking?”

She tilted her head as she was asking me.

“No, it just looks like you aren’t really happy about that.”

I only asked things to the extent I could. I had gotten a bit closer to Charlotte, but we weren’t close enough yet for me to ask any sensitive questions.

She had a powerful ability, but one that had to be kept a secret. I seemed worried about her, so she smiled at me.

“Well… I hate relying on my supernatural power."

“…Is that so?”

Charlotte laughed after that. It seemed like that was all she could tell me. I didn’t know what ability she had, but she hated it.

She lost her composure when the orc approached her so she ended up using her power. As a result, she managed to kill it, but she was dissatisfied with the fact that she had to rely on her supernatural power.

Were there any supernatural power users that actually hated their own power?

That made me even more curious about what Charlotte’s ability was.

CHAPTER 107

Around Sunday evening, we finally returned to Temple.

“There’s no place like home, right?”

“Isn’t that a little strange to say for the guy that seemed to have had the most fun?”

“Is it?”

Ludwig chuckled as he listened to my words. I wasn’t sure if the dormitory could be called home… Anyway, it was similar to one. After everyone laid eyes upon Temple, they realized that they had returned to their normal daily life; the same went for Ludwig.

It wasn’t just us who returned.

“Junior!"

Adriana and her class also came back from their group mission, so there were second years rushing towards the Royal Class dormitory as well.

Seeing how happy she was, my heart fluttered a bit.

“Oh, senior."

“Did you also just arrive?”

“Ah, yes. That’s right.”

“What? It’s just Reinhardt.”

Next to Adriana stood the second year’s A-1, Redian, the little kid who skipped a grade.

“For me to meet you as soon as I come back to Temple. Next week will be an unlucky one.”

She crossed her arms and shook her head jokingly.

“Did you only learn how to flap your lips during the group mission?"

“What? Flap my-? Are you picking a fight?"

“Stop, stop.”

When she saw two fires light up in Redina’s eyes, Adriana intervened and stopped her.

“Please understand, junior. Redina just feels bad after losing in the group mission, okay?”

“What?! That’s not it! And we won!”

“So you feel bad because you lost.”

"No, that’s not it!”

It seemed that the second years lost to Class B in their mission. I giggled at Redina.

“So that’s the reason. I’m in a good mood after winning, so I’ll cut you some slack.”

As I spoke to her teasingly, Redina’s face turned red.

“Adriana! Please scold him!”

“Okay.”

-*Whack!*

“Urgh! Why are you hitting me?”

“You’ve really gotten better at purposely doing exactly the things I hate, junior.”

Adriana took Redina’s hand and headed towards the dormitory, seeming so angry that she didn’t know what else to do.

“Anyway, congratulations on winning, junior! See you tomorrow then, right?”

“Yes.”

“Adriana! Scold him more!”

“I’m hungry, let’s go in and have dinner."

“Okay…”

When I saw the two of them walking hand in hand, I couldn’t help but think they looked like sisters. They didn’t look like classmates at all. Although they had quite the height difference between them, it wasn’t just that.

* * *

After having our dinner at Temple after a long time.

“…It’s kind of weird for me to say this since I’m here as well, but isn’t it a bit too soon to go back to your daily routine already?”

“?”

On the day we returned, Ellen began wielding her sword and training in the gym right after dinner. Of course, I was also here getting back to training as soon as possible.

“Hold it tight, if you can.”

Ellen threw one of the training swords towards me, and my reflexes were trained enough that I could catch it easily.

“Sigh… I’m going to be in pain again.”

Ellen had so many talents that it was difficult to name them in one go. However, behind that talent stood the years that she had trained and put in every bit of effort.

Erich de Lafeari was also talented, but how could someone who barely put any effort into training their talent beat someone like her?

Ellen trained her own talents every single moment of her life.

She was a hard-working genius.

In fact, when I was watching Ellen fight that orc, I thought she was simply incredible—she didn't even allow a single attack of that giant muscle pig to hit her.

Even her noticing the javelin stuck in the orc, pulling it out, and immediately stabbing it into its eye made me seriously doubt my eyes.

I'd never be able to defeat her. Ever.

"I'm coming."

"Okay."

However, being able to trade blows with someone like her for free every single day was a huge benefit already.

-Kaang!

"…"

Of course, things always ended with the same result.

* * *

After returning to my usual routine, I did my morning training and practiced my swordsmanship in the gym even after classes were over. Perhaps because I had to go through some less than ideal environmental conditions during the mission, I felt like my normal training schedule was like heaven.

I finally realized how incredible it was that I could drink water whenever I wanted and eat whenever I wanted. Drinking water could be found everywhere here.

Even the gym was air-conditioned. It was a rather fresh outlook on things, making me feel fortunate to be able to train in such a divine environment.

That was it.

After experiencing absolute poverty once, one's small little studio apartment felt like a hotel. It was something like that—it was something similar to having a winning

mentality.

Actually, that was kind of funny as my supernatural power was also based on keeping a winning mentality, so that way of thinking fits me quite well.

Anyway, it was good that my motivation to train had gotten even stronger after experiencing having to survive on an uninhabited island.

Meanwhile, on Wednesday.

Bertus called me and suddenly handed me a big bag.

“…Huh? What’s this?”

“What do you think it is? It’s money.”

It was a red bag that seemed to be made of silk. It was full of shiny gold coins.

Oh, right.

"For the jaguar leather?"

But it was still in the process of being treated, right?

"Yeah. It’s easier for me to find a buyer than you on your own, right? They paid in advance already. I’ll tell Mr. Epinhauser where he’s supposed to send it.”

I already thought that it would be pretty hard for me to find a buyer for such expensive leather, so it seemed like Bertus had already looked for one before I could even start. It also looked like they paid in advance.

Anyway, wasn’t it quite touching how much he was taking care of me? Well, it felt more like payment for doing various things for him during the mission though.

“No, but… Isn’t that too much?"

I thought I heard that I would get about 10 gold coins, but judging by the bag’s weight, its content far exceeded 10.

“To tell you the truth, the buyer is my grandfather on my mother’s side, so he gave

me quite the generous payment. I won the first group mission of the Royal Class, so it was only natural that he would be quite generous when it came to buying loot that came out of that."

The Family of Bertus's mother was Duke Salerian.

So, the person Bertus meant was, of course, Duke Salerian.

Having been in the position of being almost killed by Duke Salerian's knights before, Bertus's words were quite eerie.

His grandson, who might become the Emperor in the future, won his first group mission of the Royal Class. To Duke Salerian, the jaguar leather signified his victory over Charlotte.

Everything depended on the meaning someone gave it. So Bertus just sold it to the person who would offer the most money for it.

It felt kind of nasty that it was the head of the group that tried to kill me once.

"Anyway, thank you."

I even got indirectly involved with Duke Salerian, something I would have never dared to imagine while I was trying to escape the Demon King's Castle.

* * *

I received 30 gold coins as payment for the jaguar leather—that would be about 30 million won. What I almost left to rot in the jungle turned into a huge pile of money when I came back, so I was rather startled. If Ellen hadn't brought it back with her, and if Delphine hadn't properly skinned it, I wouldn't have received that much money.

Liana was also involved, but she said she wasn't interested in the money, so I didn't bother going to her.

After school, I took Ellen to Class B's dormitory and called out Delphin; then, I held out bundles with 10 gold coins in each of them to the two.

"Since we got 30 gold coins for it, let's take one-third each. That would be 10 gold

coins."

"Okay."

"Wow… You sold it for so much?"

"I didn't do it directly. Bertus sold it for me."

Delphin couldn't believe it when she saw the bundle of 10 gold coins in front of her. She was hesitant to take the money I was giving her.

"I mean, all I did was skin the jaguar with my poor skills… Can I even accept this…?"

It wasn't that big a deal, but it seemed like she felt a bit guilty accepting such a huge amount of money.

"If we follow your logic, I got this money by simply hitting a beast's head while it was electrocuted. What's the difference between mine and your contribution? Just take it."

If we were talking about who worked the hardest, that would probably be Ellen.

"I-is that so…? Well, thank you anyway. I really wanted to go eat something delicious with the others."

Delphin seemed to have planned to buy the others something with the huge amount of money. With the exception of Charlotte, all of Class B were commoners. Ellen put her 10 gold coins in the pocket of her school uniform and looked at me.

"Let's go eat something delicious."

"…Don't you want to go eat something expensive, not just something delicious? Like something that you usually wouldn't be able to eat because it's too expensive?"

" Yes."

…She was only thinking about eating the same food prepared differently.

In the end, Ellen and I went to eat a full course at one of Temple's most luxurious restaurants where only the kids of noble families went.

It was delicious.

It was delicious, but…

“How could they ask for one gold coin for a dish? How does that make sense?”

It was a bit more expensive than we thought it would be.

“You’re right.”

“I mean, it was tasty, but I’m not paying that money just to eat that!”

“…Is that so?”

It was delicious, so Ellen seemed to be alright with it.

“The amount was just too little.”

“…Seriously, there just has to be a dimensional crack in your stomach."

I was completely convinced that the Gates already opened disguised as Ellen’s stomach.

Anyway, Ellen said that she was still hungry, so she bought three hot dogs from the street.

* * *

After I returned to my daily schedule of studying and training, nothing really happened. If there was one thing that changed, it was that my physical abilities gradually rose.

And…

And!

[Strength 6.2 (D)]

[Agility 6.7(D)]

[Dexterity 7.7 (D+)]

[Magic 11.3 (B-)]

[Stamina 10.8(C+)]

[Demon Domination D](An Archdemon's unique ability)

(Cannot be used in current state.)

[Self Suggestion D]

[Swordsmanship F]

Comprehensive Ability Assessment – Lowest Level Demon

Battle Level Evaluation : D+

As one could see.

My pseudo-swordsmanship had finally evolved into swordsmanship.

I did it. I've got it.

Self-suggestion also rose to D rank, so my combat level rose to D+ Rank. It jumped right up from F+!

"Kuhuk…"

It might feel like insignificant growth to some, but to me, it showed the results of my hard work.

"…?"

Ellen tilted her head as if she didn't know why I suddenly sat down on the gym floor and looked thrilled. That girl was 90% responsible for the evolution of my swordsmanship.

"Thank you! It's all thanks to you!"

"…Are you sick?"

When I teared up and expressed my extreme gratitude to her, Ellen put her hand on my forehead and said: "You don't have a fever, so what's wrong with you?"

"Kuhuk… I-I could actually do it. I… Always believed I could do it!"

It was such an emotional thing for me to have finally escaped pseudo-swordsmanship. Every time I checked my status and saw that I felt dirty!

…Of course, it was a bit disappointing that my evaluation only rose to D+ after all the shit I did, but it couldn't be helped.

Life was long.

In other words, there was still a lot of time left for me to work hard.

Only one semester had passed, but when I remembered the simple fact that I still had several years of that shit left to live through, I suddenly felt like my body had lost all its strength.

"…Sigh, I want to quit."

When I despaired by myself after I got all happy, Ellen just turned around and started swinging her sword on her own.

However, thinking about all the people who were a lot stronger than me—who was just a D+ Rank—I found my motivation again.

* * *

In any case, I wasn't leading an idle life, but there just wasn't anything special happening during my daily training sessions. The only small pleasure I had was checking my gradual growth in stats occasionally.

In the morning, I exercised with Adriana, and after class, I did strength training until dinner, then I would practice my swordsmanship in the gym.

However, there was a problem.

I was getting more and more afraid of my morning training.

“Let’s just go once, okay? Please, Junior?”

The church sister was getting more aggressive with her preaching.

My biggest problem was that I had to keep in my temper because I received too many things from her up to then. I couldn’t curse at her after she had been so good to me, but I didn’t know how to politely refuse someone kind of close to me asking such things of me.

“If you decide that you don’t like it after going there just once, it’s okay if you don’t want to come anymore. So just come with me this once.”

Sister, you’re killing me!

“Aah! Fine!”

Eventually, I fell to her persistent missionary work.

“However, just once.”

“That’s fine, Junior! I’m sure you’ll also come to like it!”

It was nice to see Adriana smile so broadly. With that, I eventually accepted my defeat.

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CHAPTER 108

Of course, Temple also had clubs—the staple of every school life novel. There were clubs focused on magic research, swordsmanship, or any other field having to do with one's major; there were also music-related clubs or other more recreational ones, as well as some unspecified ones. There were also clubs with a religious focus. Since the student population exceeded one's imagination, it was a fruitless endeavor to count every club in Temple.

Although I created the club setting, the main character, Ludwig, wasn't part of any, so I didn't describe them in much detail. If I made him join a club, the main story would unfold within it. I chose to follow the second of the two ways a school life story could unfold.

I wasn't sure if any of Class A's students were part of any clubs at the time.

Anyway, Adriana was trying to take me to one of the Royal Class' clubs. Adriana served Towan, the god of purity, but it was said that there were many people who were part of the club and followed another of the Five Major Churches.

Of course, there weren't only clubs, but five shrines built for each religion in Temple. They offered classes related to religious studies, and on weekends, students with faith in any of the gods could visit to worship them even if they didn't major in divine powers. There were many religious students in Temple, who had different majors, so I knew that the shrines were full every weekend.

So, rather than taking me straight to the weekend service, Adriana would try to first open my heart to religion by talking to me about it.

Of course, I had no intention of going to any of the shrines.

She said that her club activities were every Thursday after dinner. It seemed like they had a dedicated club room on the top floor of the Royal Class' dormitory.

The club's name was 'Grace', and it was also said to be the club with the most members in all of the Royal Class. It was probably like that because the believers of the five churches gathered there.

In the end, having skipped my evening training, I went down to the lobby with the conviction in my heart that it would be the first and last time.

“Ah, junior, you’re here.”

“Yeah.”

Adriana was waiting for me in the lobby.

“Let’s go then.”

It was also my first time taking the elevator installed in the dormitory. I had used them frequently before, but it was pretty strange that I never even took the one located in the dormitory.

The 7th floor had a different structure than the lower floors where the dormitory rooms were located. There were many rooms and written on their doors were names of clubs. Due to the nature of the Royal Class, where only the most talented elites gathered, there were hardly any clubs that were simply recreational.

“It’s over there.”

Adriana walked into a hallway to our right and then stood before a rather large door.

‘May the grace of the Five Lords be with us.’

That phrase was engraved on a silver plate in beautiful handwriting hanging on the door. A silver gate plate, that was the Royal Class for you.

“Let’s go in. They’re all very good people, so you don’t have to be too nervous.”

“Do you think I’m one to get nervous?”

Adriana frowned at my joking answer then smiled.

“Okay, then let me tell you something else. Don’t cause any trouble, junior.”

“Yeah, yeah."

Adriana opened the door, and I followed her in.

* * *

It couldn't be said that this applied to everyone, but those believing in religions had some common characteristics. Assuming that they aren't fanatics, but ordinary people that just started believing in a religion or have a healthy dose of faith in them.

Should I say they didn't seem to have a shadow cast on their face, or that they don't seem to have any worries? It felt like they had some passive skill that made them extrude gentleness.

"Oh, is this friend the new arrival you said that would come by? Nice to meet you. I'm Agerton. A fourth-year."

"Ah, yes, this is Reinhardt, a first-year."

They usually had that kind and wrinkle-free expression on their face. It seemed like not all of them were there yet, but they all seemed to make a fuss and welcome the arrival of a new face.

"If you're a first-year, does that mean that you're classmates with Ashir?"

"Yes, although we're in different classes."

It seemed that B-4 Ashir—who was someone who had a talent for divine power in Class B—also belonged to the club. He looked at me from afar and seemed to want to say, 'Why is he here?'.

"Ah… Hello."

"Ah, yeah."

I barely had any interaction with him, so I could only say that much. Most of my seniors knew me from that duel; it certainly left a huge impression on them at the time.

I didn't know whether it was because of that incident or because of their personalities, but I was treated quite favorably by both men and women.

"Have you eaten dinner yet?"

“Yeah, well…”

“If you’re hungry, there are some snacks in the cabinet. You can eat whatever you find there.”

I felt like I fell into a completely different world because I was welcomed so warmly by people that seemed to never frown. I could see that they were very excited to have someone new around.

“Reinhardt only came here to take a look around today.”

Adriana tried to clarify that she brought me there but that I shouldn’t be mistaken for a new member. That didn’t mean, however, that they lost their spirit.

“Yes, yes, okay. Looking around is fine as well. You can come anytime you want, even if you just want to come hang out when you’re bored.”

“That’s right; there are many people that come here just to pass the time without signing up. You can think of it as getting closer to your seniors.”

I was surrounded by people that were happy just by me being around…

I just couldn’t get used to that.

I hate bad guys, but my twisted mentality makes me feel uncomfortable when I’m faced with someone who seems too nice. It makes me wonder if I’m comfortable around people like Bertus.

Positive energy and I don’t mix well with each other!

There were about 20 members. Since the total number of students of Royal Class was about 120, that was a pretty big number.

Of course, since the high school section had about six grades, the age range was also pretty wide.

“Oh, is that the first year, Reinhardt?”

And the person who greeted me with a bright expression seemed rather familiar; we met for the second time that day, actually.

“I’m Ceres van Owen from the 5th year. Long time no see, right?”

The president of the Royal Class’ student council, whom I remembered seeing when I was admitted, also belonged to the club.

The student council president said that although she wasn’t majoring in divine powers, she personally believed in the Sun God. She continued to say that she also served as the club’s vice president.

I felt like she was someone that got her work-life balance all messed up. She was the student council president, but she also ended up being that club’s vice president. Wasn’t that kind of weird?

Seeing that everyone was taking their eyes off of me, it seemed that they were about to start.

But was there a problem?

"Hmm… It seems that almost everyone is here, so shall we start?”

Ceres van Owen, the student council president and the club’s vice president, said with a rather awkward expression on her face.

“What about the president?”

At Adriana’s question, the student council president wore a subtle smile.

“Ah, ahaha… The president said they want to take a break, it seems…”

At those words, the overall atmosphere seemed to darken a bit. It seemed like the club’s president had been absent for a while.

Eventually, they started their club activities without the president. I didn’t really know what I should do, so I did nothing. It seemed like they started to do some ritual for which everyone had to close their eyes and recite some common prayers.

It was certainly different from the religions I knew from my previous world.

-Blessed are the five Gods…

While everyone was chanting some prayers, the room didn't only fill with a solemn atmosphere, but the bodies of some people gave off a subtle glow. The prayers of those who could use divine powers became power itself, to the point one could see it with one's eyes.

All it was was some kids getting together and praying, although one could feel a certain type of majesty from it. The club room was only filled with a few desks and some miscellaneous furniture, but I felt like I had seen a similar room before.

In fact, I even felt that the divine power emanating from their prayer actually had an effect on me as well—I felt my fatigue vanish, leaving behind a pleasant warmth.

I wondered if that place served as some kind of Fountain of Life. I was full of energy.

That surely wasn't the reason why Adriana said that it was a nice place, but it definitely felt different from the religious gatherings I had imagined.

After the prayer was over, everyone's eyes fluttered open.

Adriana smiled at me. She seemed to want to say, "It's different from what you thought, right?".

* * *

"Let's first discuss the main agenda, then. As we all had our group missions last week, let us talk about our experiences."

Since the president wasn't there, the vice president and student council president Ceres van Owen took charge of the schedule.

"First of all, all outside volunteer work has been restricted because of the attack that happened in town before, right? It has been resolved as of now."

The attack on the Knights Templar seemed to also have had an effect on this club as well.

"However, the schedule was totally thrown into disarray last time, so the plan to send out some people to treat the injured soldiers was canceled; they said everything had already been resolved. I think we should find some other way to do volunteer work."

Since the club actually had people that could use divine powers, it seemed like they were volunteering to help in places where the power of a priest would be needed.

'…What's with this?' I thought.

'Are there only people possessed by some holy spirit present here?'

I didn't think that it would be a place for me in many ways. Why were they all such angels?

Anyways, it seemed like they were trying to provide free divine magic services for wounded soldiers and civilians who weren't able to get any help somewhere else. The event got canceled because of the incident with the Templar.

So they were looking for another way to volunteer.

"Any opinions?"

"I heard there were a lot of orphans after the war. There seems to be a shortage of caretakers in public childcare facilities, so how about helping out there?"

"I think that's a very good idea."

Listening to one member's opinion, Ceres nodded, saying it was a good idea. Someone who seemed like a scribe wrote it down.

Various ideas on new volunteer activities were brought up one after the other; then they got organized.

'Just what is this?'

I was surprised because it was a place filled with so much positive energy in a different way than I thought. It seemed that only people who thought it was natural to help someone out if one had power gathered there.

I thought it would be a gathering where they talked about God, recited prayers, and reinforced their faith, but it wasn't like that at all.

Wasn't it more like a volunteer club?

After going through various discussions, it was eventually narrowed down to two plans: Helping out in the public daycare facilities and providing medical services in remote areas and the slums.

“I’ll ask the teachers about some public childcare facility locations; as for the medical service in remote areas and slums, it would take some time to find appropriate locations due to local circumstances or safety issues.“

I was again reminded that Temple was a place with great social influence. Even if we were part of Royal Class, in the end, it was only a club, but they could obtain the support of the whole institution.

Ah. I wanted to leave.

Their existence in itself was sacred, so I didn’t think I should continue to be here.

I guess I was a demon.

Rather than being confronted with an arrogant bastard, being in front of such holy and good aristocrats was kind of, kind of…

A lot more painful!

Before going there, I was afraid because of a completely different reason.

* * *

Their new volunteering schedule had been decided, so it was then time for everyone to talk about the group mission. They simply discussed whether they won or lost or if it was fun or not.

“Wasn’t this the first group mission for the first years? Ashir, Reinhardt, how was it for both of you?”

Ashir was calm and said that it was a survival mission and that they, unfortunately, lost. He said that he had no idea that an orc would come out and that he was a bit embarrassed that he just ran away because he had been too horrified confronting it.

"Haha… The first group mission certainly is a bit difficult.”

“There’s a purpose behind that. Should we call it humbling?”

The seniors also talked about the time they had to go through that, reminiscing about the past. The vice president then looked towards me.

“That would mean that Reinhardt’s class won, right? How was it?”

“Winning is good and all, but in the end, it was a huge pain in the… Arg! Why are you pinching me?”

Adriana, who was listening to me, suddenly pinched me in my thigh when I was just being honest. No, that bastard. If I were to say something wrong again, she would beat me up, right?

“Can’t my junior say some nice things?"

“What do you want me to do when my personality is like this?”

Adriana was also my senior, but from the perspective of the college-level seniors, she was only a little second-year kid, so they were looking at her and me as if our arguing was cute.

Everyone seemed surprised to hear that we fought that orc head-on—even Adriana.

“It’s not like it was me who did it; it was that girl named Ellen who took care of everything… and a kid called Harriet, who finished it off with a gigantic Fireball, so I didn’t really do anything.”

“Still! It’s great that you were ready to fight it.”

“Yeah, that’s amazing, Reinhardt.”

Ah.

I felt like I was sinking into the floor because I was surrounded by people who praised me so casually!

In the end, except for the praying in the beginning, it didn’t really seem all that religious. Everyone was just talking and chatting.

“Okay, that should end our official talk. Then let us pray. Those who would like to stay can stay, and those who want to leave can leave.”

Like that, their club activities ended. To be exact, after it was over, they gathered into groups of twos and threes to talk and eat some snacks together.

Like it had at the start, the prayer again created quite the majestic atmosphere.

After praying, Adriana stayed with me a bit longer. I asked if I could go, but I ended up getting forced to eat some of the snacks.

"Don’t you follow any type of faith?”

“Ah, erm, not really…”

The seniors asked me this and that, as I was new around there, and I tried to answer appropriately.

If I told them I believed in myself, Adriana would probably have an even bigger reaction than before.

“Still, it’s not bad to have a place to pour your heart out. Think carefully. Because the Gods reward us just as much as we put faith in them.”

If they were talking about divine power, that senior’s words were indeed true.

No, they were right, but…

I was the creator of the five Gods. I was the world’s actual creator, so to speak. So, how paradoxical was it for the creator to follow his own derivatives? That would be a real pain in the butt.

Give me strength, my babies; I’ll put my faith in you~

That was just ridiculous!

In the end, they only told me to think carefully about this; they didn’t force me to do anything. Everyone talked to me, but they also talked with each other.

“By the way, the president… Will they never show up again?”

“Hmm… I’m trying to persuade them, but I’m not sure.”

The high school seniors were talking about such topics in a hushed voice. It must have been a while since the president last showed up in the club.

“By the way, I heard that the Demon God Church seems to have reemerged…”

“The Demon God Church?”

“Yes, because of that incident, there are rumors that the Demon Realm is still intact, so it seems that their belief is spreading again. I heard about it from my uncle, who is an Inquisitor of the Church of Ars.

“I-isn’t that a pretty big deal!”

I also remembered the setting of the Demon God Church because Ludwig butted heads with some of its remnants.

The Demon God Church. They were a pro-demon force from within humanity. The one they served was the Demon God, a concept opposite of the other Gods. However, after the Demon Realm completely collapsed, they should have died out naturally—leaving only a few remnants behind.

However, the attack in the capital caused the misunderstanding that the Demon Realm hadn’t yet collapsed but was still hiding tremendous power.

That was why the Demon God Church, which should have died out, had found its glimmer of hope and maintained its faith.

I had to keep promising myself that I wouldn’t do anything that would have too many consequences that would spread like wildfire everywhere I went in the future.

The whole atmosphere turned solemn after hearing the news about the Demon God Church. For the ones believing in the orthodox religions, the Demon God Church was their main enemy and an organization to be purged.

The female senior, who said her uncle was an inquisitor of the Church of Ars—a heresy inquisitor—cautiously opened her mouth again.

"I… I’m not completely sure about this… But I heard there might be students who

believe in the Demon God's religion inside of Temple…"

"L-lies!"

"Stop! Darissa."

Ceres, who had been gentle from the start to the end, furrowed her eyebrows and glared at the senior named Darissa. The girl shuddered at Ceres' warning.

"I know who you mean. They aren't like that."

"B-but still… Isn't it dangerous?"

What were they talking about? Ceres seemed to know who she believed to be Demon God Cultists.

"I'm done talking with the student president. I got a definite answer that they weren't like that in the least."

"Still…"

"Silence."

Ceres glared at her with a cold gaze, continuing to frown.

"They are just kids that tend to say things that might be misunderstood. If these rumors spread, innocent children might get arrested by the heresy inquisitors. And you don't know how those kids might get treated after they get arrested by one, now do you?"

If rumors based on mere speculations were to spread, the kids might get arrested by a heresy inquisitor and tortured to death.

I mean, she should just stop talking bullshit and shut her damn trap because that made her look like someone who got off on spreading shitty rumors. I had just been mentally praising that group for being full of good people too…

"I-I'm sorry…"

Darissa said that she was wrong with a quivering voice and a completely white

complexion after getting scolded. Ceres looked around, seeming not as kind as before—emitting a type of pressure.

“Wherever one goes, I hear people talking about the spreading of the Demon God Church; the same goes for Temple, so don’t ever say things like that.”

Everyone froze up and said they understood.

That girl.

Maybe because she was the student council president, she emitted a kind of authoritative aura.

[Quest appeared – The Demon God Church inside Temple]

[Description ： There are rumors that there are Demon God worshippers inside Temple]

[Goal : Find out the truth behind the rumors.]

[Reward : 300 Achievement Points]

A pretty terrifying quest suddenly appeared.

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CHAPTER 109

After the club activities were over, I went down to the first floor with Adriana.

“How was it?”

“It was fine. They all seem like good people.”

They didn’t force their beliefs on me, and I was slightly embarrassed seeing people thinking so hard about how they could help others with their power.

When one was before people that seemed too good, one felt a certain kind of shame for some unknown reason; the club had made me feel like that.

“You don’t have to sign up; you can just come over if you ever feel bored. If you have any troubles, you can share them there; they can also help you in deciding what career you want to pursue with your studies and many more things.”

In the end, Adriana was more interested in introducing me to some good seniors than in forcing her belief on me. They were people who were willing to help whenever it was needed, even if they didn’t share the same faith.

Come to think of it, wasn’t that huge?

There were many children of prominent families in the Royal Class and many of them were excellent individuals—especially the older seniors. I had just created a link with them, meaning I could meet them at any time and ask them for help.

Wasn’t it weirder not to agree to that?

“Yeah, I’ll come hang out sometime.”

“You thought well, junior!”

Adriana smiled broadly because she was happy that I decided to visit the club occasionally.

It was nice to suddenly have such a large number of connections, but I also had a question.

“By the way, what did they mean by there being Demon God Cultists in Temple?”

Achievement points were very multifaceted—they were also more valuable than money. Adriana tilted her head at my question.

"Well… I think the student council president and some of the seniors know something about that, but I don’t really. It’s not something you can just ask… Since they said it’s not a big deal, it probably isn’t. Darissa is probably just someone that worries a lot in general.”

Apparently, Adriana didn’t know anything. She mentioned a senior called Darissa and the student council president, although the latter said it wasn’t that big a deal.

With that, I figured I had to get behind it on my own.

And there was another question.

“By the way, is there a problem with the club president?”

Everyone seemed to know something, but no one was talking about it.

“A-ah… That.”

Adriana was also reluctant to talk about it, scratching her cheek. She told me that we shouldn’t talk about it there, and she took me out of the dorm. It was midnight, so we tried to walk quietly and sat down next to each other on a bench with the light of a street lamp quietly illuminating us.

“Do you know who the club president is?”

“No, I have no clue.”

“Ah, you’re really not interested in the seniors, are you, junior?”

They were the president of the club with the highest member count in the Royal Class.

“She’s famous. It’s Olivia Lanze.”

Olivia Lanze. I didn’t know that name. It seemed like she was someone existing in the margins of the story as well.

“The president is pretty famous, but there’s someone even more famous than her.”

“And who would that be?”

“Yes. It’s Riverrier Lanze. Haven’t you heard of him?”

“Yeah… I don’t know him.”

I hadn’t heard of that guy either.

“He’s the commander of the Knights Templar.”

Ah.

I had completely forgotten about him.

He was that guy.

I felt terribly ashamed that I completely forgot about a character I wrote myself—and someone with a lot of power at that.

“Then… Who’s the president?”

“Well, she’s the commander’s daughter."

Olivia Lanze. A fifth year.

She was the daughter of the Knights Templar commander.

* * *

The Knights Templar was a group consisting of paladins and priests of any of the Five Churches. After the end of the Demon World War, it should have naturally been dissolved, but it would remain as it was.

In other words, it was a group that moved according to the Five Popes' will, but in the end, the Commander of the Knights Templar had a lot of power as well. Religion is a concept independent of the state, so even the Emperor had to step back when faced with the influence and actual power of the Knights Templar commander.

Olivia Lanze, daughter of Riverrier Lanze, the Commander of the Knights Templar.

She even had the nickname 'Saint of the Eredian District'. Not only was she incredibly passionate about volunteer work, but she also seemed to have incredible skills.

"To tell the truth… My dream was to be someone like her."

She was such a perfect person in almost every way that she was Adriana's role model.

"She said that she wanted to join the Knights Templar after she graduated."

It seemed that she immediately wanted to join the Knights Templar instead of continuing her studies. She was such a kind person that people called her model student and saint—that was the kind of impression she left on others.

"But, for some reason, she hasn't come to any of the meetings lately… I heard that she doesn't attend any of Temple's classes anymore as well."

Adriana seemed worried about her.

The student who had only been leading an upright life up until then suddenly became truant. The girl who was so devoted to volunteer work suddenly didn't come to her club meetings or classes.

"I don't really know what is going on with her because she's a senior. I guess the teachers are also having a hard time."

If someone who was undisciplined from the start did such things, they would be expelled or disciplined, but instead it was a case that involved the student among students. Therefore, it seemed like the teachers were trying to lead her to the right path again. She was even graduating soon. If she wasn't careful, she wouldn't fit into her uniform anymore.

A truant student.

“Things have just felt a little off recently. I’m frustrated because I don’t know what’s going on. I’m really worried.”

It seemed pretty hard on Adriana, seeing her role model and mental support gradually falling apart.

“Couldn’t you just go and ask her what’s going on?”

“Huh… Pardon?”

“Although she doesn’t go to class, she’s still in Temple, right?”

“Ah. Yes. Yes, but… She’s such a lofty senior and…”

Really, that girl.

Well.

She wasn’t wrong. She was only a second year in high school, after all. It might be a bit difficult for her to tell a senior that had been around much longer that she was worried about her recent behavior.

“You’re frustrated, aren’t you? So are you just going to wait until your stomach explodes or something? If you’re curious, go ask.”

“I mean…”

Adriana fell silent for a moment, but then she nodded firmly, seeming as if she had made up her mind.

* * *

The next day, morning.

Adriana, who came down for her morning training, looked worse than she had the previous day.

“Did you go visit her yesterday?”

“Huh? Ah… Yes. Yes…”

Looking at her expression, it seemed like she didn't get a very positive answer. Or did she get told that it was none of her business? Normally, she would just tell me right away, but instead, Adriana led me to a bench and sat down next to me.

"Reinhardt, good work today!"

"Uhm, thanks."

Ludwig and the others who were there for their morning training greeted me as they rushed past me. Scarlett and Charlotte were also exercising every morning. Ellen was already too far away.

Adriana looked very pensive.

"What's going on?"

Adriana looked like she had experienced something unbelievable.

"The president… wants to quit."

"…She wants to quit? The club?"

Of course, she would feel somewhat betrayed, but was that really something over which one had to make such an expression for?

"No, not the club…"

There was the reason why Adriana was so shocked.

"She wants to quit Temple…"

With her graduation just around the corner, Olivia Ranche wanted to quit Temple.

"Not only that… She also said that she abandoned all her faith."

From what I heard, this story wasn't all that simple.

The seniors didn't say anything, but they probably all knew. I guessed that they didn't tell their juniors because they feared it would cause confusion.

“What happened?”

“I don’t know… She didn’t tell me."

I didn’t exactly know what they talked about, but she probably just told her that she would quit everything without getting into her reasons as to why she would do that.

She didn’t only deviate a little; she was about to turn her whole life upside down—abandoning both her faith and Temple. She was even called Saint of the Eredian district, the area where Temple was located. Just what the hell happened to her?

Did she join the Church of the Demon God? Was there a possibility that it had something to do with my quest? However, I wasn’t sure if she would be able to completely abandon her religious life and make a total U-turn in the opposite direction.

Adriana seemed absolutely devastated. That was understandable because she had suddenly found out that her idol decided to give up on her faith and Temple, after all.

“I’m sure there’s something going on……”

It was clear that something tremendous had happened to Olivia Lanze. However, she was a far-off senior, so we wouldn’t be able to find out anything more.

“Well… Even if we knew what happened, I doubt we could do much about it. She said she wants to quit, so we couldn’t just tell her to come back to her senses, right?”

“……That’s true.”

Adriana looked towards the ground, disappointed.

Seeing Adriana, who had always been calm and collected, looking down like that…

What the hell.

Wasn’t that strangely cute?

……

I had similar thoughts when I was with Harriet.

Was I a sadist?

No, I mean, if I compiled all the things I did up until then, wasn't there a 100% chance that I was a sadist?

Or was I simply weird?

"Junior, would it be rude if I tried finding out what happened to the president?" Adriana mumbled in a sullen voice.

She knew she couldn't change that person's decision, but she still wanted to know why someone with such strong convictions and beliefs suddenly decided to give up on everything.

Why would she be scared? However, Adriana seemed to think that it was rather rude for her to try and find out the reason.

"That would be rude."

"I guessed as much…"

Adriana let out a sigh of relief. As expected, she wanted to stop thinking about it, but she couldn't.

It was rude to dig up things on a senior behind her back. Something like that didn't suit Adriana at all.

"I'm an expert in being rude."

"……Huh?"

"I'll be rude in your stead."

When I told her that I'd find out these things for her, she seemed greatly perplexed.

Being rude was my specialty.

"Ju-junior…?"

The flustered Adrianna was cute as well, but I liked her usual self a lot more.

* * *

I would get achievement points for finding out the truth behind the rumors about the Demon God Church, I wouldn't get any for the thing with Olivia Lanze. I figured that the connection between those two things was either not there or very vague.

Still, despite my rude behavior and mischievous acts, Adriana had taken care of me up until then. Even though she must have seen me as a very bad person, she was still kind to me and helped me out.

Adriana was like Temple's version of Eleris to me.

In the end, it was only advantageous for me to have made a connection with that club. Although she would have been happy if I found a belief, she just took me there so that I could get to know various people.

As I kept on receiving help from her, I wanted to give her something back.

Adriana was grateful, but she asked me to not pick a fight with the seniors or cause any trouble. She was grateful for my intentions but still worried that I might punch someone again like usual.

Of course, it was highly unlikely that I would end up hitting someone.

I mean, they were in their fifth year. Someone who reached the fifth grade in Royal Class and had a combat talent should be pretty confident in winning a fight if they weren't completely stupid. There should be some monsters among them that already reached a superhuman level, and wasn't Olivia Lanze the same?

The fifth-year, Olivia Lanze.

Why did that girl want to quit Tempel and abandon her faith? I had shouted out quite confidently that I would be rude in Adriana's stead, but I couldn't really think of any reason.

If it was for a personal reason, wasn't it pretty much impossible to find out?

If I didn't move, I would never find out a single thing. I started my investigation by going to see Bertus after class.

“Ah, Reinhardt. What’s the matter?”

After the group mission on the uninhabited island, I felt like Bertus was pretty kind to me. While he was busy contemplating whether he should give up or not, I was able to make him move to action.

He might think, deep down, that they might have lost the group mission if not for me.

Urgh.

It was definitely a good thing to build a good relationship with the guy. How should I say it? It felt a bit scary and a bit uncomfortable.

I had rather complicated feelings about it.

Still, it wasn’t something I had to keep a secret. I didn’t have to be wary of Bertus and Charlotte.

“I just want to ask you something.”

"What might that be?"

We were at the tea terrace adjacent to the dormitory, the sun was still up, so it wasn’t quite evening yet.

“Do you know Olivia Lanze?"

"Aah, are you talking about the daughter of the Knights Templar Commander?”

Bertus nodded, saying he knew her as she was quite the celebrity. Since she was the daughter of the Knights Templar leader, one couldn’t help but know about her.

“Do you know her personally?”

If she was acquainted with Bertus, he might be able to find out those things a lot easier than me.

“Hmm, I’ve seen the Knights Templar Commander in official settings a few times, but I have never seen her before. Although she is quite famous, she doesn’t have any actual title or position. I’ve heard quite a few rumors, though. What did they call her?

Saint of the Eredian district? Pfft… Hm, yeah, that's what they call her."

Bertus burst into laughter, sounding as if he got tickled by the remaining sunlight when he brought up the word saint. He saw the Knights Templar Commander a few times but didn't know his daughter.

That was right. The Commander was an important person, but that title wasn't hereditary, so therefore she wasn't all that important. It couldn't be helped that she wasn't acquainted with Bertus.

"Why do you ask?"

Bertus seemed curious as to why I asked him about one of our seniors so openly.

"No, it's just that she seemed to have said that she would quit Temple and abandon her faith… I was wondering why she would do that. It's not anything big."

"……She's quitting?"

"Yeah, that's what I heard."

Bertus seemed surprised as if it was the first time he heard of that.

"Hmm… I thought I wouldn't have to worry about the senior years, and yet this happened."

It seemed like Bertus didn't intend on gathering information that didn't concern him. He began to ponder over the strange piece of news reaching him out of nowhere.

"That's certainly strange; even though I don't know her that well, she wasn't only famous inside of Temple but outside of it as well."

"Just how famous is she?"

Although Bertus didn't know much about the fifth-years, he knew more than I did because he was in a position where a lot of information converged.

"She was a Temple student—so she couldn't participate in the Demon World War—but I heard that her abilities were already at a level where they could be used in actual combat. She knew that she wouldn't be able to participate in the war, but she

took a special leave of absence for a year to give out free medical support. I know that she has returned now that the Demon World War is over. She was already thought to possess divine powers similar to a High Priest. There were a lot of people saved by her, so she became famous as the rumors far and wide. That's how the nickname "Saint of the Eredian district" was born."

Her divine powers weren't merely on the same level as a regular priest, but a high priest. She was still a student, so she couldn't participate in the war, but she ended up saving a tremendous amount of people during the Demon World War.

"She's an amazing person."

"She sure is. If she were to join the Knights Templar, she would be their next Commander. If she were to join the Church of Towan, she would be its next pope."

She had excellent abilities and strived to use them for the people. With the reputation gained from her actions, there would be no one against her becoming the next Commander of the Knights Templar.

"But she suddenly decided to abandon everything… Hmm. This is troubling."

Bertus frowned for some reason. Why was he so troubled?

"Troubling?"

At my question, Bertus took a sip of black tea and crossed his arms.

"No, I just wanted her to be the next commander of the Knights Templar."

"Why?"

"Wouldn't it be nice for someone like her to sit in such a position?"

That was what he said, but I was able to read the intention behind Bertus's words.

The Knights Templar was a huge and powerful organization, difficult to deal with for the Empire. He thought there should be some nice, virtuous person at their head so that they wouldn't get any dangerous ideas.

In other words, judging by those words and his tone of voice, it seemed like the

current Commander wasn't someone that suited Bertus's taste.

Obviously, the Knights Templar had demon slaves, and during the incident last time, they actually tried to take those succubi for themselves. Since Bertus knew what was going on inside of their organization, it was clear that he didn't like them all that much.

Hmm? Come to think of it.

No way…

"Perhaps the reason for her decision is one of two things," Bertus said while looking at the scenery unfolding outside of the dormitory, where there was still some gentle sunlight kissing the ground.

"One would be that she became disillusioned when she learned that the Knights Templar were a very different group than she first thought…"

Bertus looked at me and smiled. He looked like he was about to tell a pretty nasty joke.

"The second would be that she found herself a man."

At that moment, I remembered something I had forgotten.

Priests of Saint Towan couldn't marry.

CHAPTER 110

Bertus didn't mention the type of people the Knights Templar actually were. If he wanted to do that, he would have had to tell me first that the country divided the demonic prisoners among themselves to sate their lustful desires.

Of course, even if Bertus didn't explicitly tell me, I knew about it.

I had no idea what became of Olivia Lanze in the original novel.

Her desire to quit Temple and abandon her faith might or might not be a result of this terrorist incident. However, since it was an event that had a significant impact on the Knights Templar, Olivia Lanze, the daughter of the Knights Templar Commander, might have been affected as well.

Of course, her leaving might have happened no matter what.

If she had found out that the Knights Templar were keeping the demon prisoners as slaves, she would have felt an incredible sense of betrayal.

After graduating, she had planned on joining them; if she found out that such ugly desires actually corrupted the Knights Templar, it was more than understandable that she would want to quit Temple and give up on her faith from the sense of betrayal.

She devoted her whole life to that group, but because she found out that it was all rotten inside, she couldn't keep going as if nothing had happened anymore.

She could have found out that both the Knights Templar as well as the Church of Towan were completely corrupted. Just listening to the stories told about her, one could get a sense that she was someone with a strong sense of justice, with a deep faith and kindness in her heart.

That was the first possibility.

As for the second possibility Bertus had mentioned as a joke…

Priests of Towan couldn't get married, so she might have wanted to let go of her faith because she actually had a lover.

It wasn't entirely impossible, but if that were the truth, that would be kind of shocking. Just what kind of fiery love was that?

Bertus remained silent for a while after stating those two speculations.

"Hmm… I think this might be a serious problem, Reinhardt."

"Is it that serious?"

"Don't you think she's going to get into some serious trouble?"

Bertus even looked slightly nervous; it was really unlike him. What did he mean by trouble? It was already pretty troubling that someone like her had decided to throw away her faith and quit school voluntarily, but she was going to get into even bigger trouble?

"What do you mean?"

"I can't tell you much in detail, but if she were trying to abandon her faith and quit Temple because she found out about the corruption in the Knights Templar… Wouldn't she try to reveal it out of guilt?"

"Ah…"

I would think so.

"The ones causing the most trouble aren't slick guys like you but honest bastards like Olivia Lanze."

Bertus simply described the Saint of the Eredian district Olivia Lanze as an honest bastard.

No, but why was he saying that all of a sudden?

* * *

She had discovered the corruption of the church—corruption so great that she was

compelled to give up on her faith. However, her disposition was honest and good. She would try to reveal that the organization she believed in was internally corrupt—even if it was her father who stood right in the center of such corruption.

The image of the Knights Templar and the whole religious group would be severely damaged. Of course, something like that didn't happen in the original novel. I wasn't even aware at that moment that the Knights Templar was like that. I mean, that wasn't even the main focus of their description.

I wrote that they were just a group called the Knights Templar and that they mainly consisted of paladins and priests and that they also fought when the gates opened; that was all the description they got.

In other words, one could conclude that the incident was caused by the butterfly effect as a reaction to my terrorist incident. Another possible outcome was that Olivia Lanze wouldn't even be able to make her move.

At that point, we couldn't know how the events would unfold. However, Bertus was aware of that fact.

"Hmm… If I can, I'd like to just wait and watch it crumble…"

Bertus didn't like the Knights Templar anyway. Even if one wasn't an insider, it would be a huge deal if the reputable saint suddenly went public and revealed things like that.

However, if that were to happen, the truth about the demon prisoners getting divided among the participating countries would also be revealed. The general public had no clue about the true story behind the terrorist incident at all.

It would be a lethal blow not only to the Knights Templar but to all the nations that participated in the Demon World War.

"I want to go meet her."

Bertus was the Imperial Prince.

No matter how young he was, she wouldn't be able to turn down Bertus' request for a meeting.

Bertus stood up, saying that he would talk to her. The nature of their talk wasn't something that could be shared with me, so he didn't bring me with him.

"Uhmm…"

How come things felt like they were getting blown more and more out of proportion?

Did I stir up a hornet's nest just then?

* * *

Bertus returned around evening. After dinner, he called me back to the tea terrace.

"What do you think?"

"…How should I say it? She herself felt like a good person, but I felt strangely uncomfortable around her. There's nothing wrong with her though… Hmm… It was the first time I felt that way."

Ah.

Interesting.

It seemed like he felt what I felt when I went to that religious club before, that strange uncomfortable feeling when faced with someone simply too good and nice.

As expected, I had that strange feeling because my nature was closer to Bertus's, huh? He sighed and sipped on his tea.

"Of course, it was as bad as I expected. I can't even communicate with that idiot."

Being good was nice and all, but Bertus seemed to have seen her as an idiot he couldn't communicate with. I didn't know what they talked about, but he had probably tried and failed to negotiate with her.

However, one had to admire Bertus' toughness, being able to call someone with a grandiose nickname like 'Saint of the Eredian District' just an idiot.

"To answer your questions. You just need to know this…"

Bertus was actually giving me an answer to my original question.

“She discovered a problem within the Knights Templar; that is why she wants to give up on everything. And also…”

Bertus wore a strange smile and tilted his head.

"This isn’t just a matter of her wanting to quit Temple and abandon her faith. If she keeps being like that, she won’t have a simple death."

Looking at Bertus talking about someone’s death with a smile reminded me again what type of person he originally was supposed to be.

“You can’t be thinking…”

Of killing Olivia Lanze, are you? I couldn’t even finish posing that question. Olivia Lanze was an influential person who could cause a lot of trouble if left alone. This also involved the image of the Empire, after all.

If so, Bertus might try to get rid of her before she could cause any damage.

“No way, I won’t do something like that.”

As if he knew what I was thinking, Bertus expressed his displeasure.

"Aren’t we in Temple?”

Bertus added that to make me understand. I nodded.

Yeah, Olivia Lanze blabbing carelessly was a problem. However, it would cause a lot of problems for the Empire if something were to happen to one of Temple’s Royal Class students.

Causing a bigger problem just to cover up another one was a tremendous disgrace—that was what Bertus was trying to say.

Hence, Bertus wouldn’t do something like that, but—to be honest—I wasn’t sure.

"By the way, she doesn’t know you, so why did you suddenly become curious about her?”

Bertus seemed more curious as to why I suddenly got interested in an unrelated senior's personal affairs.

"…A senior I know is worried about her."

"Ah, that one?"

Bertus nodded his head, knowing that Adriana and I were pretty close.

"This won't end well for her."

No matter if Bertus would do something or not, his tone of voice betrayed a feeling of certainty that a big incident would happen soon.

The palms of my hands were covered in a cold sweat.

* * *

I couldn't give Adriana such information as is.

Honest bastards would cause big problems. Adriana was probably one of those bastards as well. If she found out about it, she would definitely try to do something herself and put herself in danger.

Damn it.

The life of someone I hadn't even met yet was in danger.

Bertus had a conversation with Olivia Lanze, who was obviously going to do something stupid for the prestige of the Empire. However, I realized that they couldn't communicate at all.

Because of me, things might have gotten worse. Although the odds were very slim, Bertus might still take some drastic measures.

I decided to go up to the fifth floor myself. Talking to Adelia would only have only increased the number of troublemakers.

When I reached the Class A year five dormitory lobby, everyone's eyes were focused on me, opened wide. They were probably wondering why someone of the lower

years would come there.

“I, erm… I’m looking for a senior named Olivia Lanze.”

“Oh… I see. Okay. Wait here a second.”

"Okay, thank you."

As if they knew what was going on, the senior I asked just let out a sigh.

Olivia seemed to have played a certain role in the creation of the gloomy atmosphere permeating the Class A year five.

The senior who told me to wait in the lobby for a bit kindly went in person to call her.

The students that were in their fifth year in Temple’s high school section were 21 years old. They were already adults. However, because she had shut herself in for a year, she would be 22.

I was told that Olivia Lanze, whom I was about to meet, already possessed immense divine powers to the point where she could use high-ranking divine magic.

I didn’t know if she was just as talented combat-wise, but I guessed she was.

After some time, someone that seemed to be her—wearing a Royal Class uniform—walked towards me with that other senior beside her.

She must have fallen into the deep pits of despair, so her expression seemed a little stiff, but she couldn’t hide her gentle personality and good nature…

“There have been a lot of people looking for me recently. What’s going on?”

I didn’t know much about her, but I could tell that she was a stunning beauty.

* * *

Just seeing her goddess-like appearance was enough for me to understand why they called her Saint of the Eredian district. Her rich platinum blond—almost white—hair came down to her waist, and her face was adorned with beautiful slanted, green eyes as well as slightly warm, pink lips.

Even just looking at her, I wondered how such a picturesque person could even exist. She was so perfectly beautiful that it almost felt unnatural.

“U-uhm… Well. My name is Reinhardt. A first-year student.”

“Ha, aah… So you’re Reinhardt. Yes. I see.”

She smiled and patted my head a little, perhaps because she heard about me a little from Bertus.

“You seem to worry about me, although I don’t know why. Thank you, Reinhardt.”

Even though she had only touched me a little, it felt divine. I clearly felt my heart pounding. No. I was in trouble. I didn’t go there for that. I couldn’t concentrate.

It wasn’t like it was love at first sight or anything, but I felt like someone who had just dived into a completely different world. I wondered whether I was even allowed to face her like that.

What was it?

There were a lot of kids, even in my grade, that were able to turn others’ eyes, but for some reason, I felt so embarrassed meeting this person’s eyes.

I felt like I was faced with the world’s most beautiful woman.

“So, what do you want to talk about?”

"Eh, uhm… Could we talk in a more quiet place?”

I couldn’t even make proper eye contact with her, but I had no choice but to say it.

My behavior was bound to cause some misunderstandings.

No matter how one looked at it, it was the perfect picture of a first-year kid falling in love at first sight with their fifth-year senior!

CHAPTER 111

Olivia readily agreed when a junior that she had never seen before showed up and asked to talk to her; she didn't show the slightest amount of reluctance, suspicion, or disdain towards me.

We ended up deciding to talk in one of the empty clubrooms on the seventh floor.

"No one should be able to hear us here. Are you okay?"

"Ah, yes…"

She dragged over two chairs before sitting down on one. She was probably about 170 cm tall. Why did her face seem so small? Even if she hadn't been religious, her benevolent expression made her seem like she would have been a great and successful person.

It was the first time I felt so intimidated just by facing someone.

It wasn't because I was afraid of her or anything but instead came about because of her appearance. It was the first time I had felt that way, so it was especially bizarre.

I sat on the chair across from her and finally forced myself to make eye contact.

"Well, I heard you talked with Bertus."

"Ah, the Prince. Yes. I did."

"I don't know what you were talking about exactly… But I know the general situation."

Her expression darkened slightly when she heard my words.

"I see. But before that, do we know each other from somewhere? I'm really sorry… Although I have heard about you, Reinhardt, this is my first time meeting you… I was a little surprised when I was told that you were concerned about me."

She seemed quite surprised that a junior unfamiliar to her was concerned about her.

“Well, it’s not me really… Adriana is the one worried about you. She seems worried about what’s going on with you, senior, but was hesitant to ask in case she appeared to be rude, so I tried asking around in her stead.”

“Ah… Adriana… Okay, I understand…”

As I spoke of Adriana, Olivia lowered her head with a miserable expression on her face, making it clear that she knew what I was speaking of.

"I think I’m worrying far too many people…”

Regardless of her intentions, it seemed that she found it difficult to bear having caused the people around her so much worry.

“I don’t know you that well, senior, but I heard that many people expect great things from you, and there are many that see you as their idol. I know this might be out of my place to say, but… Won’t you change your mind?”

Even while hearing such things from a young junior who appeared out of nowhere, it was enough evidence for Olivia’s great personality that she didn’t even flinch at that.

Olivia continued to look at me.

Her eyes were still gentle, but they showed a bit of stubbornness.

“If I were to change my mind… Do you mean that I should just put up with everything and let it go?”

"That’s not what I’m trying to say, but you shouldn’t act so hastily until you reach a position where you can actually cause some change. If you decide to act up now, your safety will also be compromised…”

“You’re saying the same things as the Prince.”

My words seemed no different from Bertus’s.

Reach a position influential enough to cause change and then make it happen. What you’re doing right now will only put yourself at risk, and you won’t be able to change a

single thing. You'd cause a brief uproar, but in the end, you won't be able to achieve anything.

Put differently; it was quite the arrogant remark. Telling her that all she had to do was get appointed and she would be able to eliminate any absurdities in the organization. However, I couldn't think of anything else to convince Olivia with.

"You're called Reinhardt, right?"

"…Yes."

Olivia looked at me quietly.

"Justice knows no compromise."

I could see now why Bertus called her an idiot.

What would a writer who wrote down such cheesy things be if not a fucking idiot?

Of course, her mindset in itself was admirable, but that didn't change the fact that she was an idiot.

"After making one compromise, I would just end up making another. While I acknowledge and realize that this is realistically impossible, if the scope of these compromises becomes broader and broader, I would eventually end up having to give up on a lot of things, and I would only start resembling those things I want to change."

Once things become difficult and I just keep on enduring it, I'd become similar to the ones I so desperately wanted to change—all in the name of being realistic.

"Senior, if you call those that keep on compromising cowards, then those who can't compromise would be people that end up doing terrible things."

Those who had excessive confidence in themselves would end up becoming the most fearful people in the world, regardless of whether their initial intentions were good or bad. How much harm did people like that do to society?

Olivia Lanze seemed like one such confident person.

Wouldn’t even more terrifying things happen if someone like her silently became the Pope or the Commander of the Knights Templar? She might even end up carrying out a widespread purge.

A completely different question rose up in my mind.

If that were to happen, what would I do?

"You sound like you’ve already seen someone like that.”

I knew of many such cases. It was just that they weren’t part of this world.

“Reinhardt, I think I know what you’re trying to say. You think I'm an extreme fundamentalist—someone who can’t tolerate even a little bit of injustice and thinks that all priests should be part of a one and only true religion.”

She didn’t tell me that I was too young to even comprehend what she was trying to do.

She was trying to talk to me properly.

“Reinhardt, although justice knows no compromise, this is the only compromise I was willing to make”

Olivia understood what I was trying to say.

She said that her current behavior was a compromise already.

“If I were to endure this to save the rotten tree from its roots, I would end up becoming one of two things. Either by acknowledging reality and keeping on compromising, I would become like the people I want to change. Or I might end up sacrificing many people in the name of changing everything the right way.”

Olivia was an idiot, but she wasn’t stupid.

She wanted to show me that she had already contemplated deeply about it, as it was her own problem.

She knew that there were only two paths lying before her: the path of a fallen priest or the path of a slayer covered in the blood of millions in the name of Reformation.

“I want to become neither of the two.”

She only wanted to escape both these inevitable futures she would have to face if she went on in the same manner. It wasn’t just a decision made out of her disillusionment with her faith or disappointment in the Knights Templar—she had put in much more thought.

She made her decision while considering that she might turn into a monster. It was a problem to fall to corruption, but it was also one to not fall to it.

The decision was a necessary one for herself and many others.

Olivia eventually made a compromise that she wouldn’t bend on.

She would give up on everything.

Bertus and I had told her how she should compromise a bit and hold on for the time being but neither of us knew her well enough. We didn’t know that if she were to endure, only terrible things would happen to her.

“…I’m sorry for speaking out of turn. I… I think there has been a misunderstanding.”

I could only say that much.

I went overboard.

I could only judge someone’s thoughts and opinions with my own limited knowledge of the truth, but Olivia Lanze was a completely different person from what I had imagined.

She was already prepared for her own death. I knew this without having to ask her.

“No, Reinhardt, thank you for being so concerned with me, even though we don’t really know each other. I mean it.”

She hugged me gently as if she was truly grateful.

It felt like she had lost a lot of things.

"Be happy."

It sounded like a final goodbye.

* * *

Olivia wasn't someone that one could convince by just telling her that her life would be in danger.

In a way, I couldn't deny that her choice was the best she could make for herself.

Would it be Bertus who'd take action, or would it be the other side?

I would see the results on the weekend.

After my morning training, Adriana and I acted the same as usual. I found out the truth, but I was still thinking about whether I should tell Adriana or not.

If she knew why Olivia made her decision, it would be a devastating blow to Adriana's faith. She would be seriously shocked if I just bluntly told her. I didn't know if I had the right to tell her those things, so I had no choice but to remain silent.

Both Adriana and I were both very low in tension. Adriana was depressed for her own reasons, and I felt guilty that I knew the truth but didn't know whether I should tell her or not.

Then we saw something on our way back from training.

"Ah… Senior…"

"Ah… Adriana. Reinhardt…"

It was Olivia Lanze, who had just come out of Temple's dormitory; a man stood next to her.

She dragged around a large trunk as if she was about to go somewhere far away.

"Are they your acquaintances?"

"Yes… Father."

Father.

With those words, the man's identity was immediately revealed.

The Commander of the Knights Templar, Riverrier Lanze.

He looked at the two of us and briefly spoke up.

"Study hard."

Adriana couldn't say anything when faced with the Commander of the Knights Templar, there was also the fact that Olivia Lanze was leaving right in front of her.

However, I could clearly see that Olivia's eyes were red, and her cheeks were a little swollen.

She wasn't leaving on her own accord.

She said she would voluntarily quit, but it felt more like her getting dragged away than her voluntarily quitting.

"Goodbye, both of you."

They looked like a prisoner and her jailer, rather than father and daughter.

Adriana was chasing the back of this girl who was about to get further and further away.

"Senior… Are you leaving…?"

"…I think so."

"Senior, if I didn't see wrong… I think you cried, didn't you?"

"Yes."

Olivia said that she would quit Temple, but for some reason, she was getting dragged away in such a manner.

Bertus knew that he wouldn't have to take any action. Of course, Riverrier Lanze would have known the condition Olivia was in, and he obviously would have predicted what she wanted to do.

In a way, the appearance of the Knights Templar's Commander was an inevitable result.

If the Knights Templar forced themselves into Temple and tried to take Olivia Lanze, Temple would have the right to refuse.

However, they could not prevent her father from taking away his child.

* * *

Keeping Olivia Lanze, of whom he didn't know what she might end up saying, in Temple must have been rather unsettling for the Commander of the Knights Templar.

So he decided to drag her away earlier than she originally planned.

Even though I only witnessed it for a brief moment, the coercive, vertical relationship between them was plainly visible.

In the end, even if it wasn't the time she wanted to go, didn't she still get what she wanted? But her expression looked so miserable while she was getting dragged away.

"What… What's going on, junior."

Adriana and I didn't go back to the dormitory and sat down on a bench, staring blankly.

"Actually, I talked with Olivia yesterday."

"Re-really?"

It seemed impossible at that moment to keep on hiding it from Adriana.

I wasn't supposed to know the details of the incident, so I had no choice but to explain it to her rather vaguely. Olivia discovered the ugly side of the Knights Templar, so she concluded that joining the Knights Templar or the Church would hold terrible consequences for her and many others.

Adriana was stunned at my explanation as to why she decided to give up on everything. Was she shocked that Olivia told me everything but not her, or was she

shocked that the Knights Templar she planned on entering herself had an ugly side?

"…I see."

Adriana couldn't even imagine just what Olivia had to go through to come to such a decision. I believed she found out about the demon slaves, but they might have committed many other atrocities I didn't know about as well.

"I'm so confused… I don't know what to do anymore…"

It seemed clear that the Knights Templar took Olivia away to cover up their dirty secret. Adriana had lost focus in her eyes, perhaps because the values that had made up her foundation had been shaken.

Anyway, the conclusion was that Olivia would never return to Temple ever again. Riverrier Lanze had forced his own daughter to quit, dragging her by her wrist.

Daughter.

No, wait a minute.

Olivia Lanze served Towan, the God of Purity.

"…Which God does the Commander of the Knights Templar serve?"

"Huh? Ah… As far as I know, he serves Towan."

"Aren't priests of Towan unable to marry? How can he have a daughter…?"

She must have inherited the belief in Towan from her parents, but how could the Commander of the Knights Templar, who followed Towan's doctrine, have a daughter?

"Senior is… his foster daughter."

Olivia Lanze was adopted.

All the pieces fell into place.

She didn't have strong divine powers because she was the daughter of the Knights

Templar's Commander.

She was adopted by him because she had such a strong talent. Her father had meant to foster the next Commander of the Knights Templar or the Pope.

The girl he raised for that purpose suddenly decided to give up on everything and even tried to damage the Knights Templar and the Church.

Wouldn't the Commander get really angry in that situation?

"Junior, don't tell anyone what you told me just now."

Adriana muttered blankly as if she came to a conclusion.

"Regardless of whether this is true or not, you might get arrested by the heresy inquisitors for slandering the Knights Templar. Don't even tell your seniors."

"…Okay."

We weren't celebrities on the level of Olivia Lanze, so we wouldn't be in any position to just open our mouths as we wanted.

Adriana jumped up from her seat.

She looked full of determination.

"I'll have to follow her for now."

"…Things won't change, even if we go and see what's going on."

I decided to follow her because I felt uncomfortable not knowing what the situation was like.

"If we are to get caught, we'll just say that we followed our favorite senior because we don't want her to leave, okay?"

"Understood."

Even if they caught us following them, we could just act like stubborn children. Plus, if he really wanted to touch us, he had to be prepared to collide with Temple.

The Commander might be able to take his daughter, but he wasn't able to take us.

CHAPTER 112

Fortunately, it was the weekend, so we were free to go out even though it was early in the morning. There weren't many people up and about so early, except for those hard-working students, but we were able to follow those two across a fairly long distance.

Olivia Lanze walked with her head hanging down like a criminal, and the Commander was walking next to her without saying a single word.

They exited Temple and headed towards the station.

There was a problem. Adriana and I couldn't help but simply look at each other.

"…"

"…"

Mana trains weren't free to ride. It was only natural that we didn't think of bringing any money with us because we spontaneously decided to follow them after our morning training. Therein lay the problem.

It was an emergency mission that had to end as soon as we two idiots started following them.

"Wha-what do we do?"

"We could leave our Student IDs as a deposit… I didn't even bring my student ID through."

We only came out with the clothes on our bodies, nothing else.

Of course, if we're talking about valuables, there was Sarkegaar's ring and the Flame of Tuesday that I was always wearing, but those weren't things I could pawn off.

It was early in the morning, but there were already quite a lot of people at the station. Even though it was the weekend, there were still some people that came to

Temple for work.

We had to come to a decision as fast as possible. I just walked up to a man wearing a suit, not knowing if they were part of the faculty or someone from the shopping street.

“E-excuse me. Teacher?”

“Huh? What’s the matter?"

“We’re Temple students, but… we forgot our wallets, and we have to quickly take the train… Couldn’t you give us some money for a ticket…?”

D-damn it.

I never thought I would have to do something like that one day.

It felt like capital punishment!

Ah… I forgot my wallet, can’t you give me 5000 won for a ride home?

That was what it was!

“…Really? Your Student ID… Looks like you don’t have it with you either. Can you tell me which school you’re part of?”

“I’m Reinhardt, first year, Class A, number 11 of the Royal Class, and this is Adriana, second year, Class A, number 2. Yes. If you contact us later, we’ll pay you back.”

“Royal Class? Huh… I don’t know what it is that is so urgent, but I guess you’re in a hurry. Don’t forget your wallets next time.”

“Thank you!”

Fortunately, he believed me and kindly handed me the money for a ticket, probably because he was part of the faculty. He seemed to have realized that I was telling the truth as soon as I stated my affiliation.

The people’s hearts were so pure. Was it because we had entered the Golden Age?

Adriana stared at me blankly as I obtained the money for our tickets by begging.

“Co-come to think of it, you were…”

Adriana nodded, perhaps remembering that I told her that I was from the streets.

That’s not it! That was only a fabricated story! It was my first time doing something like that as well!

I felt quite shitty being seen as someone skillful in this because of how fast I decided to do it.

* * *

We bought some tickets and followed them again. We didn’t get on the same train compartment as them, but we did wait for them to board before taking the compartment next to them. There weren’t many people on the train—perhaps because it was dawn.

Because of that, we opted to talk in whispers.

“Where are they going?"

“They probably live close to the Knights Templar’s headquarters in the Commander’s residence. We’ll have to get off at the station close to the Knights Templar headquarters in Rosenak.”

Rosenak was the Yangcheon District.

To be honest, I couldn’t remember all the districts, so I had put a map of the Imperial Capital in my room.

Anyway, I had already been to the Rosenak District—where the headquarters of the Knights Templar were located—when we were rescuing the demon prisoners last time.

Last time, I hadn’t gone there with good intentions, but my business there was completely different this time.

They changed their routes a few times while we kept following them. They seemed

to be talking about something with each other, so when I strengthened my sense of hearing, I was able to distinguish their voices from all the noise around us.

It seemed like they didn't notice at all that they were being followed—we were still in their blind spot. They spoke in low voices so that no one could eavesdrop on them, but I could hear them clearly.

-Do you really want to go down the difficult path?

-… I'm sorry, father.

– You'll give in sooner or later anyway.

-Can't… can't you just excommunicate me? What I saw and heard, I'll forget everything about those things.

-That's not going to work.

-…

-You can change your personality, you can change your mindset, but you cannot change your talents. You cannot change what you are born with. You have been born holding everything: appearance, talent, and skill. You were born with everything. That's why you became my daughter.

-…

-Groups always have their good share of noise in them. Those who want to be perfect in every aspect cannot be leaders—those humans only live drunk on their own good looks. You are destined to be a leader, not some outstanding individual. This is only one aspect you simply have to accept. I wasn't all that surprised that you criticized me. There are times where certain things have to be said and done.

-I… I can't do this. I… like you said, Father… I'm just a wretched person living intoxicated by my own good looks. So please, father…

-Rather than stupidly getting hurt, it is wiser to just accept how things are at the moment.

Getting hurt.

It looked like something exceeding my expectations was about to happen.

It seemed like if she didn't accept this on her own, he would continue to pressure her until she did.

He wasn't trying to punish Olivia, but he had no intentions of letting Olivia go.

-I don't think I'll ever change my mind. So, father… Please…

Please…

-Stop.

-…

-I won't listen to your drivel anymore.

After that, the Commander didn't speak a word.

* * *

"They didn't say anything specific, but I heard him mention something about *'getting hurt'*."

"Getting… hurt?"

"Yes. Something like that… I think he might be talking about coercive methods."

Adriana's eyes shook as if she couldn't believe what she heard.

Coercion. Adriana could only think of one thing, hearing this word.

The thing that was bound to come to mind was heresy interrogation.

"The-there's no way… Does he want to do a heresy interrogation or something… Is that what it means…?"

"It's not completely unlikely."

While she said that she was innocent and would live quietly, he still tried to change

her mind—even if he had to do so forcibly. The Commander, who had been careful with his words in a public area, had not said anything ever since; because he didn't say anything explicitly, Adriana and I could only think about the most extreme things Olivia could suffer through.

Upon arriving at the station close to the Knights Templar's headquarters, the Commander and Olivia headed towards the headquarters and not their home. We had no choice but to just stare blankly at the scene.

She just said that she wanted to quit Temple and forget everything about her religion, but the Commander was about to force her to accept everything. It would probably involve a lot of violent methods.

Olivia probably wouldn't have thought that he'd do something like that to her, even though he's her stepfather. Had she known, she would have run far away.

She thought it would be enough to promise to keep her mouth shut forever, but it seemed like she didn't understand the depth of her stepfather's obsession.

"Why do they have to do this…? Where the hell are they taking her…"

Adriana sobbed and hid in an alleyway, covering her face with both her hands.

It was true that Olivia Lanze was a great person, but why was he trying to force her to become his successor by torturing her even though she didn't want that?

The Knights Templar weren't the least bit ashamed by Olivia Lanze discovering their ugly side. They thought it was something she had to know in order to become their next Commander.

Olivia would have been faced with this situation no matter if the terrorist incident happened or not.

However, the character Olivia Lanze never had to play any major role throughout the whole novel I wrote.

In other words, she didn't even show up when the Gates opened, even though she was such a powerful person.

This meant that the Commander failed in changing Olivia's mind.

She would either get completely ruined by this incident or, in the worst-case scenario, die.

And the thing that confirmed my reasoning…

[Special Achievement Quest – The Inflection Point of History (Olivia Lanze)]

[Description : If Olivia Lanze is rescued, the future will undergo dramatic changes.]

[Reward : You will receive one characteristic of Olivia Lanze at random.]

An inflection point of history.

If a person that wasn't supposed to exist continues to live and that person could exert a tremendous amount of influence, that was what would be called an inflection point of history. It meant that history would change drastically. I knew this because of Charlotte's case. In fact, due to Charlotte's survival, the main story had become greatly twisted, making events unpredictable.

Olivia Lanze was someone on the same level.

The mere occurrence of such a quest made it crystal clear that something fatal would happen to Olivia Lanze that day, and she would either die or suffer greatly.

In other words, it was like the system told me what her future would be.

"This… This is ridiculous. This shouldn't happen."

Adriana continued to cry for a long time before she looked at me with a firm expression on her face.

As she said, I didn't know Olivia Lanze very well, but I didn't want to let her die or get ruined.

If I could save her, I wanted to do so.

The compensation was only of secondary priority; I just wanted to save her. It annoyed me that such a kind person had to be either broken or killed after getting treated so unfairly.

I didn't even know what I should make of Olivia's quest reward. To begin with, it was the first time something as abstract as that was given to me as a reward.

I never set up any 'characteristics', after all. This was an additional setting that the system just created on its own.

"I'm of the same opinion… So, what should we do?"

It was impossible for just the two of us to simply enter the Knights Templar's headquarters and rescue Olivia. None of us had any reason to even be close to their headquarters in the first place. We might be able to get in somehow, but we wouldn't be able to get even a centimeter closer to where Olivia Lanze was being held and tortured.

We had to fight power with power.

Charlotte or Bertus might be a good choice, but I couldn't think of a single reason why they would want to save Olivia Lanze.

First of all, even if the Prince or Princess was to put pressure on the Knights Templar, that would cause some tremendous uproar—as they were interfering with their affairs.

Interference in their internal affairs was already a serious diplomatic issue in and of itself. The Knights Templar weren't a nation, but they weren't much different from one. No, rather, it might be an even bigger problem that a secular power was trying to interfere with a religious group.

Charlotte and Bertus could be of help in that situation, but it would probably have been rather hard to get their help.

"If a lot of people found out about this… Wouldn't things be different?"

Adriana found out that the Knights Templar was trying to do something completely outrageous. What if thousands of people heard the rumors that the Saint of the Eredian district was being tortured by the Knights Templar?

The public was sure to get angry about what those guys were pulling.

"Something would definitely change. However, the moment they admitted to these

things would be the moment the Knights Templar crossed the river of no return, so they'll do anything in their power to deny these 'groundless accusations'."

If they were to admit that they did something as outrageous as this, they could throw their image into the fucking garbage. Of course, they would deny it with all their might.

Their religious groups already had a huge following—they might regard those rumors as ridiculous slander against the Knights Templar.

What should we do? It was more than clear that spreading rumors would take a long time, and there wasn't a guarantee that Olivia Lanze would be safe while we made our move.

The fastest way was to mobilize one of the big powers of the nation, but Bertus took his attention off of the situation, thinking that the Knights Templar would take care of Olivia Lanze on their own. Even if he wanted to have her as the next Commander of the Knights Templar, whether they achieved that by brainwashing or not had nothing to do with Bertus. They'd make her into something that wouldn't be able to cause any trouble anyway.

In the end, Charlotte and Bertus would have to carry a high risk, and they had no reason nor justification for why they should make a move.

A huge power.

Mobilize big powers…

Come to think of it… I was only considering the ones with the most power I knew of.

There were many powerful people around me, but I had just realized that there was another huge power I could make use of.

Power that would have a lot of influence as well as a justification to move.

"Urg… Senior, don't laugh at what I'm about and just listen to me."

"Di-did you think of something?"

However, bringing the words over my lips was a little difficult.

“H-how about we talk to the teachers about this?”

Let’s just go to the teachers!

I found what I said quite ridiculous as well, so I stuttered a little.

“Ah…”

Adriana’s expression began to deteriorate as she heard my words.

I put it that way, but what I meant was to use Temple’s power!

Although, it wasn’t any different from saying ‘let’s go and tell on them’. Huh.

CHAPTER 113

Not every teacher of Temple was actually strong—some would only teach and guide the students in their classes.

However, the leaders of Temple were also made up of those faculty members, so they shouldn't be ignored. Although Temple was an institution affiliated with the Empire, it still held enormous amounts of power. Of course, they couldn't exercise this power outside of Temple-related matters, but if it had something to do with Temple, then their authority was incredibly strong.

If it concerned the safety of Temple's students, of course, it would be a matter of concern for Temple.

Protecting the safety of their students was one of Temple's highest priorities.

Adriana looked at me with a puzzled expression after listening to my explanation.

"I-I'm not sure if this'll work…"

In the end, it wasn't any different than us just running up to them and saying, "Teacher, there's a big problem!"

It wasn't just that…

"This would also attract the attention of the student council."

Another influential power—Temple's student council.

Ceres van Owen, the student council president of Royal Class, was part of the religious club "Grace". She could talk to the student council president of the whole student body—which encompassed 100,000+ students—at any time.

They were the president of Temple's student council, where the sons and daughters of prominent families gathered. I didn't know who they were, but it was clear that they wouldn't get ignored if they decided to push for something in the name of Temple's student council president.

If the faculty and the student council made a move, even the Knights Templar wouldn't be able to ignore it. The combination of both of those powers could be seen as the Empire itself making a move.

When people gathered, power would arise; if extraordinary people gathered, extraordinary power would arise.

Additionally, the justification that they were worried about a student's safety was absolutely perfect.

"Okay, junior, I understand what you're talking about."

A first-year and a second-year in a dingy alleyway were conspiring to move the entirety of Temple.

"But… Will it be okay?"

"What?"

"This is very dangerous. If something goes wrong, junior and I might get sent to the inquisition or taken in directly by a heresy inquisitor for insulting the Church."

In any case, if we were to take that route, we would have to go to the teachers as well as the Royal Class' student council president and tell them the whole truth about the incident.

We didn't have any proof for our story yet. If we played our hand badly, or if Temple ended up colliding with the Knights Templar and they were able to identify the two of us, we would become their target.

Of course, the whole thing was rather risky.

"Let's act a bit more discreetly."

I was of the same opinion.

"Let's start things off with an anonymous letter."

"Anonymous?"

“Yeah, we’ll just write them a letter telling them what happened.”

“…Would they trust an anonymous letter?”

“Of course they would.”

An anonymous letter saying that the Commander of the Knights Templar was torturing his own daughter—who the hell would believe such slander without any hard evidence?

However, the people that receive the letter would believe it.

“They can’t help but believe it because we’ll be the ones to deliver it to the club.”

Adriana and I would send this anonymous letter by delivering it ourselves, acting as if we found it. We would probably say something like: “I don’t know what this is about, but we should check things out first.”.

We would create some suspicion within the club and make them cry out for action. The club’s opinions would then get delivered to the student council and the faculty members.

Doing it that way, the source of all those rumors would remain unknown, but it would still lead to decisive movement.

* * *

Our plan of action had been decided. We had to move quickly. We didn’t know when they would start to torture Olivia or how long she would be able to hold out without breaking or dying.

We had no actual proof. After all, I had only overheard the Commander’s and Olivia’s conversation.

“Well then, let’s go back…”

Adriana and I were about to enter the station when we had to stop in our tracks again. We stared at each other numbly once again.

“Money…”

"…Right."

When I begged someone for money, they only gave me enough for two tickets; I didn't even think about getting enough money to buy a ticket back.

"…We think so hard about these important matters but end up making stupid mistakes like this."

"…Yeah."

Up to that point, we were thinking hard as if we were planning the coup of the century, but we didn't even have enough money to go back to Temple.

Adriana looked at me expectantly.

"J-junior… Erm…"

I pretty much knew what those expecting eyes meant.

These eyes made me regret having done what I did earlier.

"Nope."

"H-huh."

"You do it this time, senior."

"J-junior…"

Adrianna looked at me with tearful eyes, but I just crossed my arms and smiled at her. Were you trying to sit back and not move a finger?

"No. You go and do it."

"Uuurg… O-okay…"

In the end, Adriana started begging for the money to buy two train tickets in front of the Knights Templar's headquarters.

Adriana succeeded immediately, perhaps because this elegant and cool-looking girl

looked like she really was about to cry.

-Thank you! Thank you! May the Five Gods be with you!

-W-well… It's fine. You don't have to do this…

-Thank you!

Adriana thanked the passerby for giving her the money so much that he seemed to feel sorry for her. It looked ridiculously cute from a distance.

"…"

Adriana's face turned bright red as she probably had never thought that she might end up having to beg for some money in her life. She seemed to be deathly embarrassed. I just laughed with my arms folded.

"You succeeded on your first try! Aren't you talented?"

"D-don't…"

Adriana stared at me and trembled. Oh, she was cute in a different way than Harriet.

And did she forget that I was a crazy bastard that would do even more if I was told to stop?

"I feel like your true calling isn't with the Knights Templar. Although your major is…"

"Shut up!"

-*Bam!*

"Urk!"

Adriana hit me seriously that time, and not on my back, but on my head.

I wondered if I would end up fainting from that hit.

"Are you trying to fucking kill your junior just because he joked around a bit?!"

“Shut up! Just shut up and follow me!”

Adriana grabbed my arm and started to drag me behind her.

It was also kind of interesting making Adriana, who only spoke elegantly and politely, talk roughly.

* * *

After begging two more times, we managed to return to Temple. I couldn’t help but feel insanely grateful to have money in my pocket.

The sun was already pretty high up in the sky, as dawn had already passed.

Our mission was simple.

We had to bring the letter I wrote to the clubroom. Club meetings were held every Thursday, but the club members often gathered in the room on other days as well. I was told that bored members sometimes gathered in the club room to pray, study, or chat.

If we just left it in the club room, someone would end up finding it and checking its content. Since its contents were so unusual, they would pass the information to the vice-president, Crese van Owen.

After that, they would hold a club meeting, so Adriana and I had to play along.

This was necessary to prevent it from revealing that the two of us were the sources of the information.

I immediately wrote up an anonymous letter and handed it to Adriana. Since I wasn’t an official member yet, Adriana would draw less suspicion when she snuck the letter in.

“But can I really not take part in the meeting?”

I didn’t know if Adriana would be able to manage without me, but I doubted that people would understand why I had to be present in an emergency meeting.

“You haven’t signed up yet, but… I could say that I brought you along because this

involved Olivia, junior. Can't I just use that? You actually talked to Senior, right?"

"Well… It's a good excuse."

"Yes."

Adriana nodded her head with a serious expression on her face.

It was just a letter, but depending on how we acted, Temple's student council—as well as Temple's leaders—might end up battling the Knights Templar. It was unclear how things might turn out, but Olivia Lanze's life was at stake.

Adriana knew fully well what we were trying to do, so she probably was nervous.

Would the student council and Temple's faculty actually move because of this?

Would it really be possible to pressure the Knights Templar enough to rescue Olivia Lanze if they actually moved?

Nothing was certain.

It was the best we could do at the moment.

* * *

It was my usual time for my training on weekends, but I just stayed in my room to organize my thoughts.

I didn't know Olivia Lanze well, but she left a strong first impression on me.

Putting the achievement points aside, someone like her—who tried her best to help people—shouldn't face such an end after only 22 short years.

Good people should live a long and happy life.

I wanted something as unrealistic as that to happen right in front of my eyes at least once in my life.

It was hard to predict how things would unfold, but I really wanted this to succeed.

I was trying to use the Revise Function to ensure that Olivia Lanze would manage to safely escape from the Knights Templar.

[Overly abstract Revisions will not be carried out.]

The order 'Olivia Lanze will escape safely from the Knights Templar' was too abstract—I had to come up with a more detailed plan.

There was a limit to my mental capability to organize things, so I wrote down the specific steps of the event I wanted to happen.

The Temple student council and faculty members will try to bring Olivia Lanze back to Temple, and the Commander of the Knights Templar will be forced to hand her over to them.

[You are trying to do too many things at once. To make events happen as stated, 10.000 achievement points are required.]

[Just start writing a novel, but… lol.]

"This little fuck."

It had been some time since I wanted to punch the people behind that notification window. They were intentionally trying to insult me.

Don't put 'lol' at the end!

I got even madder because I felt like I knew what it was trying to say.

Just write a novel. Oh right, you already did that, right? But your skills are just… lol.

That's what you meant, right?! You little fuck!

Anyway.

If there were too many parts—even if it was probable enough—it required a truckload of achievement points, as various scenarios had to be generated while removing any variables.

Then, how about this?

[Preview]

It was a function I had never used before. It was explained that it was only available in certain situations, but at that moment, it was shown as available.

Damn it, how could there be a cheat I couldn't use at all times? Still, I was glad that I was able to use it then.

Anyway, I decided to try working with it.

With it, I would be able to see how events would unfold in the future; if a problem arose, I would be able to correct it through my actions in the present so that it wouldn't happen in the future.

[The limitedly available 'Preview' function allows you to see the results of future events.]

[If you use a great amount of achievement points, you can grasp the overall flow of events. However, as you probably already know, you won't be able to do this.]

Previewing the entire version of the future is expensive, so don't even dream about it.

Why couldn't you just keep it to yourself? Why did you have to mention my achievement points? You weren't going to let me do anything, right? In the end, even if I had 200,000 points, I wouldn't be able to do it because I would need 200,500!

I realized that this fucking bastard would tell me that I was short on achievement points every time I tried to do something slightly more convenient for myself with achievement points! They did that intentionally!

Like: *I see what you're going to do with that Revision, so don't even dream about it.*

[How surprising—you figured it out.]

What? Something flickered in front of my eyes, but it was gone so fast I couldn't read what it said. What did they write? They insulted me again, didn't they?

Now that my level of anger had exceeded a certain point, I was about to give up.

[Anyway, Preview will show you major future events of the scenario you wish to see.

Usually, there are multiple major events, so they will be subdivided. Of course, every event holds its own hints.]

That meant it wouldn't do something as stupid as show me the events happening in some neighborhood bar somewhere in the southern parts of the continent.

I would be able to see the future of something of my choosing.

But wait, what kind of events would they be? If I preview them, wouldn't my way of thinking change? That would mean that the future would change accordingly, right?

[Considering this case, it will be assumed that you had not used the Preview Function. Thus, your behavior leading to these outcomes won't be affected by any future knowledge your current self may have.]

Damn it.

The rules of this Preview function seemed unnecessarily twisted.

I had to be really aware of how I'd usually act in these situations without knowing the future. That way, I could take other actions during those major events.

Of course, Preview might also just show me the result of everything. Well, I was only using it right then because I really didn't know how things would turn out.

Please, I hope everything goes well.

Let's use Preview.

[Do you want to use the 'Preview' function?]

[Since this is the first time you are using this function, a discount will be given.]

[The prices may be subject to change the next time you use this function.]

[1000 Points][500 Points][200 Points][100 Points]

As if I was supposed to choose between products, four prices appeared before me.

It was my first time using that function, so these were supposed to be discount

prices.

Goddamnit, there were multiple options. The more I paid, the more definite the hint I would get would be. Since I could use it several times, I chose the 100-point option.

[You have spent 100 achievement points.]

One of the key events involving Olivia Lanze began to unfold in my head.

I saw a completely different scenery around me as if I was dreaming.

The 100-point option showed me a stationary picture, not a video.

It was nighttime.

I could see the date.

June 28th, the 323rd year of the Imperial Calendar. Around 10pm.

The current date was Saturday, May 23rd.

This scene was from about a month later.

Even though I wasn't absolutely sure what happened, I could guess.

Olivia Lanze was sitting on the cold stone floor in rags—they were tattered and covered in blood.

There was saliva dripping down the corner of her slightly opened mouth. Her eyes were unfocused.

Whatever happened to her, one could see something that seemed a little too artificial to be scars on her bare skin visible through the tears in those rags. It was a stationary image, so I couldn't properly see what they were, but I could guess that they were traces from certain magic circles.

The strange thing was that, even though her clothes were covered in copious amounts of dried-up blood, I couldn't find a single wound or scab on her body. All I could see were those things that seemed like magic circles.

However, there were fragments of things all around her.

A closer look revealed that they were blood-stained toenails. It was clear that she was tortured by getting her finger- and toenails pulled out.

However, her toenails were still attached.

I roughly understood what had happened.

“Motherfuckers…”

It was the Knights Templar.

They tortured her, restored her to her original state using recovery spells, and then tortured her some more. It was an infinite loop. Witnessing with my own two eyes what insane things could be done with divine powers, I felt goosebumps rise up all over my body.

You couldn’t stay sane if something like that was done to you.

Olivia Lanze was completely broken.

After she was imprisoned in something similar to a dungeon and tortured, Olivia Lanze was thoroughly destroyed.

If we continued as we had been, we would definitely fail.

CHAPTER 114

I memorized what I believed was important in the Preview world and returned to reality. The fact that Olivia remained imprisoned for more than a month meant that we would fail even if we tried to save her with what we had planned. During that time, Olivia would become completely broken after enduring unending torture and magical treatment.

If we went on like that, we would end up failing, although I didn't know why.

The 100-point option showed me the key event depicting our failure, but it didn't give me a reason as to why we had failed.

It was just too vague.

I had to do it one more time.

"Sigh…"

I picked the 200-point Preview option next.

I had already confirmed our failure using the 100-point option, so I hoped I would be able to use the 200-point option to get a clue as to why we failed.

The 200-point option showed me a short dialogue.

The date was around 4pm on Sunday, May 24th of the 323rd year of the Imperial Calendar.

That would have been the next day.

It was a place I knew—it was the club room of 'Grace'. All of the club members—including myself—were sitting in a circle.

"When I asked if I could speak with the president for a moment… I was allowed to."

Olivia was in her fifth year, but she took one year off to do volunteer work related to

the Demon World War. Therefore, Ceres seemed to be really respectful when speaking about the president.

“However… The atmosphere was definitely weird. She had a very hard expression on her face. I think there was something she was hiding. Like something she couldn’t say while the Commander was around. I asked him several times to let us speak alone, but it seemed like he wouldn’t allow her to be unsupervised for even a second.”

It seemed like Ceres van Owen stopped by the Knights Templars’ headquarters to figure out the situation. She had met both Olivia and the Commander. However, Olivia couldn’t say anything because the Commander was close to them.

“The Commander said that his daughter decided to quit Temple, so he was only respecting her decision.”

It was definitely suspicious but didn’t serve as a confirmation. Olivia wasn’t able to say anything out of the ordinary; it was as if she had been silenced.

Ceres went directly to them but wasn’t able to get a definite answer to those suspicions. She had her doubts but wasn’t sure. It would have been impossible to petition for Olivia to be taken back without any hard evidence.

So did things just end there without anything happening? Even if we were to meet up with Olivia, she wouldn’t be able to ask for help because the Commander watched over her at all times, right?

“First off, I went to the teachers… but they told me that it would take some time because they had to go through a faculty meeting first.”

Since the students had failed, did the teachers fail as well?

* * *

After the Preview was over, my head hurt even more after I returned back to reality.

Olivia couldn’t talk freely. I knew that she was deathly afraid of Riverrier Lanze just by having overheard a conversation between her and him. We weren’t able to turn those suspicions into certainty. So, knowing what happened after, I knew that we wouldn’t be able to save Olivia.

However, if that was the case, I had no idea what else to do. The teachers would have to go through a faculty meeting, so it would take some time before they could act.

'Should I watch the 500-point Preview?'

The 100-point option indicated we'd fail, and the 200-point option indicated that even if we went to see Olivia Lanze and tried to talk to her, she would be too terrified to say anything.

'Will the 500-point option show me something more decisive?'

After much deliberation, I finally decided to use the 500-point option.

[You have spent 500 achievement points.]

I had instantly used up 800 achievement points.

As long as I was able to save Olivia Lanze, it didn't matter. Besides, I would quickly get more points anyway.

Please don't be anything vague, but be something certain.

* * *

It was June 3rd in the 323rd year of the Imperial Calendar, around 5pm.

That was 2 weeks from then.

What appeared before my eyes was a place I wasn't familiar with. It looked like a conference room, and there appeared to be a group of people sitting around a large table—there were about 20 of them. I wondered who those people were, but then I saw two familiar faces among them.

Mr. Epinhauser and Mr. Mustrang.

I knew what I was seeing.

It was Royal Class' faculty meeting. There was one teacher of each class, the headmaster, various assistant teachers, and even executive-level teachers present.

-Bang!

“This doesn’t make any sense!”

Someone shouted angrily. It was a woman. I didn’t know who she was.

“I’m sure Olivia is going through something! Didn’t she already turn down the personal visitation request? If there was nothing going on, why did she reject it? Other students also said that Olivia looked very bad when they saw her, so something must be going on!”

The headmaster of the Royal Class, who looked slightly older than her and sat at the head of the table, sighed in response to her exasperated exclamation.

“It’s not like we don’t know that. You know this as well, Ms. Sabrina. The decision of the Temple General Assembly came fast enough… There’s nothing more Temple can do at this time. This has fallen into the Investigation Agency’s jurisdiction. However… I wonder if we are able to investigate the Knights Templars’ Commander without any evidence… This situation is too unclear.”

‘What happened?’

“Just one day… Really. If it had just been one day earlier… No, if I just paid more attention to her concerns a little sooner…”

The teacher, who I guessed was Olivia’s homeroom teacher, eventually began to cry—tears flowing down her face.

I didn’t know why, but Temple’s response was delayed due to several meetings. Something was definitely wrong.

What did she mean by being just one day earlier? What did that mean?

“Unfortunately, Olivia Lanze is no longer a Temple student. There’s nothing we can do.”

Only after I heard those words did I feel like I could put the puzzle together.

Olivia Lanze had dropped out the previous day, so Temple lost all justification to do anything about Olivia Lanze’s situation.

He might have sensed something and quickly forced her to drop out officially, telling the Temple official something like," Who are you to take away my daughter? She isn't even a Temple student anymore."

If the General Assembly had come to a conclusion just a few days earlier, the faculty would have been able to do something, but just a single day threw a wedge in everything. They might also have been able to tell the administration office in advance that Olivia Lanze might unexpectedly drop out and that they should delay the handling of her case a day.

I didn't waste those 800 points.

Now I knew for sure where the problem lay.

Ceres van Owen was able to meet up with Olivia early on, but she couldn't say anything because Riverrier was around. It might be because she was scared of him, but there were many other possible reasons for that.

Considering the various magical procedures that seemed to have been performed on Olivia, there might be a possibility that one of them prevented her from speaking.

After that, the student council president would have asked the teachers for help. However, they had to be cautious so as to not act against the Knights Templar without any evidence, so they debated whether to send them an official request to hand over Olivia or not.

After Temple finally decided to take action, Olivia Lanze was no longer a Temple student.

This led to Temple being unable to meddle in Olivia Lanze's personal life. The rest fell into the jurisdiction of the Investigations Agency—and it was more than clear that they didn't take any actions.

In the end, the Commander seemed to have failed in brainwashing or subduing Olivia, so he hadn't achieved his goal.

If things went on like that, there would have been a catastrophic outcome for everyone.

* * *

After dinner ended, Adriana called out to me.

“Let’s go, junior.”

“Yes.”

Judging by the look on her face, it seemed like things worked out as we had planned.

After dinner, all members—save for those that had yet to return to Temple—were gathered in Grace’s club room.

All the people sitting on one side seemed to have read the letter, as they had serious, frozen expressions on their faces.

“Ah… You said your name was Reinhardt, right?”

“Yeah.”

Ceres van Owen, the student council president and vice club president, looked at me with a somewhat ambiguous expression. She seemed to be unsure whether I could stay or not.

“Hmm… That’s right. I was told you went to visit the president. Come, sit here.”

It looked like she didn’t want to kick me out because she realized that I had visited Olivia, who was in the same grade as her. She probably somehow found out that I was somewhat concerned about her for some reason.

Before her lay the anonymous letter I had written.

Ceres waved my letter around to a silent crowd.

“If this is a prank, it’s a very tasteless one… However, no matter how I look at it, this doesn’t seem to be a prank.”

“What does it say?”

“What’s going on?”

Those who knew—as well as those who didn’t—had a gloomy look on their faces as

if they were wondering if something bad had happened.

“There might be some among you who don’t know yet, but the Knights Templar Commander came to Temple personally and took the president away with him.”

“Th-the president? He came personally?”

“Yeah, it was too early in the morning, so I couldn’t see it myself, but I think some people did.”

As of that moment, only her classmates would have known that Olivia Lanze was gone. It made sense that everyone else seemed rather confused.

“And this letter states that the Commander is going to do something very horrible to her. Something like… torture.”

Torture.

They couldn’t help but be surprised that such a horrible word came out of the vice-president’s mouth.

It was already surprising enough that the Commander of the Knights Templar took his daughter away early in the morning as if kidnapping her, but now there was an anonymous letter telling that he was torturing his daughter.

“What… What nonsense is that?”

“Yeah…”

“Who would pull such a prank?”

So it was inevitable that the other’s reactions were quite negative.

The atmosphere immediately turned chaotic. With all of those unbelievable stories raining on them all at once, it was only natural.

“Now, now, calm down.”

Ceres calmed the others down and put more power into her gaze.

“This is a vicious prank as well as a tremendous insult to the Commander of the Knights Templar.”

Hearing those words, both Adriana and I got chills running down our spines. It was only natural that they questioned the authenticity of the letter, but seeing it happen right in front of us made us realize that getting caught might far exceed the level of just being troublesome.

“……However, no matter if the letter is telling the truth or not, there were actually people who saw the president getting taken away by the Commander this morning—those who went to train in the morning saw it clearly.”

It seemed like Ceres was informed about Olivia’s disappearance by people who actually witnessed it.

“Another common point in their recounts was that the president had been beaten by the Commander. They said she seemed as if she was getting dragged away forcefully.”

Olivia had been beaten by the Commander. It wasn’t just Adriana and me who saw that. It seemed certain that the Commander actually used violence against his own foster daughter. That alone surprised everyone.

“I don’t care who wrote the letter or who brought it here; I believe we need to make sure that the president is absolutely safe.”

Ceres seemed to be convinced that the letter’s contents were false, but she seemed sure that the Commander would do anything to rectify her behavior of abandoning her own faith.

It had already been confirmed that he was willing to use violence against his foster daughter.

He might not end up torturing her, but Riverrier Lanze might do something drastic to fix his wayward child’s thoughts.

Adriana and I didn’t have to say anything to make the letter seem more credible. Ceres had already decided to check things out with her own eyes.

“I’ll go and check on her tomorrow. I’ll tell you if she’s okay or not, so please be careful until then.”

It was already late, so it would be difficult to go visit her. Therefore, Ceres decided to visit the headquarters of the Knights Templar tomorrow afternoon, as I had seen.

Judging by the situation, neither Adriana nor I would have ended up saying anything because Ceres had already reached the conclusion we wanted.

It was the path that led to the future I had seen.

Ceres would head to the headquarters of the Knights Templar on her own, returning with unanswered questions. She had doubts but had no definite evidence. The Commander would let her meet Olivia, but he wouldn't allow them to be alone in the same room.

I wasn't sure if she was able to mobilize the student council to meet Olivia after that. There was a very high chance that they didn't get to meet.

The moment Ceres returned empty-handed, I would have to think about other measures on how to secure evidence, a method that would provide absolute answers.

I had to think of another method because I had confirmed that we could meet Olivia but that we wouldn't be able to find anything noteworthy, which I, of course, thought of as a result of having seen the future. Because I had seen that things didn't turn out well, I could deduce that the Commander only let us meet her once.

That meant we only had a single chance to meet up with Olivia.

Olivia wouldn't be able to say anything either because the Commander was next to her or because they cast some spell on her to force her to keep her mouth shut.

"Vice-president, I think we should consider one thing."

When I voiced my opinion, all eyes turned to me. The moment I opened my mouth, they might have suspected that it was me who wrote the letter, but it was time to step up.

If things went on like that, everything would end terribly.

"One thing? What do you mean?"

“Well… I don’t know her well, but is the president very scared of the Commander?”

At my question, Ceres slightly nodded.

“Hmm… Although the president is a fifth-year student, she is a senior, so the sixth-years might know more about her than I do.”

Olivia was only living with her juniors because she had been gone for a year. For that reason, the sixth-year students might know more about her.

Of course, we had two sixth-years there with us, so Ceres looked over to them. They were a male and female senior.

“Hmm… Now that I think about it… I think she tried to not talk too much about the Commander.”

Those were the words of the male senior.

“I’m sure she’s scared of him. Every time the topic came up… How should I call it? The atmosphere around her dimmed. I’ve seen that quite a few times. She seemed to be trembling a bit.”

The female senior seemed to know her a little better. Everyone found out that Olivia was afraid of her stepfather, Riverrier Lanze. I looked at Ceres.

“If you go visit her like this… I don’t think she will be able to answer properly—no matter what you ask her, don’t you think?”

“Well… But if I asked to be left alone with her… Wouldn’t she be able to tell the details?”

No, the Commander wouldn’t allow that.

“This may or may not be true. But wouldn’t it be better to be prepared for all scenarios?”

It didn’t seem that they would belittle me for being just a little junior who didn’t know anything. It was good that they all had such nice personalities. If there was one among them having only a little bit too much pride, they would have yelled at me to shut my fucking mouth. Ceres didn’t have to, but she agreed with my opinion…

“Yeah, there’s always the possibility that we won’t be able to have a good conversation. However, how are we supposed to prepare for that?”

There was a way to listen to what Olivia, who was silenced either by fear or by a magic spell, really had to say.

“I think it would be good to take one more person with you.”

She shouldn’t go alone but should instead take one more person with her.

“One more person… Reinhardt, do you want to come with me?”

Most of their expressions seemed to ask me something like: “Excuse me, but what are you going to do there?”

“No, not me.”

I wanted her to take someone else with her, not me.

“Ah!” B-4 Ashir, who was sitting in his seat in complete silence, suddenly exclaimed.

“There’s a student named Ibia among Class B’s first years.”

Number B-7, Ibia.

She wasn’t a character that got a lot of action, but she was needed more than anyone else in that situation.

“Why do you think I need to take her with me, Reinhardt?”

“She has telepathic abilities.”

Everyone was surprised at my words.

CHAPTER 115

Ibia was someone who had no connection to the club whatsoever. However, if the student council president asked her to come with her, she probably would do it.

At that moment, the level of her ability was still rather low—so it would only be possible for her to send telepathic messages unilaterally—but later in my book she was able to establish a two-way communication. However, that was enough for the moment.

She could tell her things like, "*If you are being threatened right now, touch your nose. if you are being tortured, touch your hair.*"

Everyone agreed that someone like her, who had such a talent, should be brought along; they even complimented me, saying that it was a great idea.

If we got her direct testimony, we wouldn't get the same lukewarm response from Temple that I had seen in the preview. This would be enough basis for Temple to immediately move, and if we wanted to go a bit further, we could also go to the guards.

But I still felt a bit anxious.

There was a high possibility that the Commander of the Knights Templar might consolidate them with words. If he started torturing her or cast magic on her just a bit later, they wouldn't be able to meet Olivia at that stage.

But the die had already been cast.

* * *

The next day, after lunch.

"It's okay. There's nothing to be anxious about."

Ceres stood in front of the headquarters of the Knights Templar, holding the very anxious telepath Ibia's hand.

“W-will it really be okay? I’m scared that I’ll make a mistake…”

“Don’t worry. It’s just in case. Everything will be fine. If you think that we’re in a situation in which we have to ask a few questions, then you can do that at your own discretion.”

“O-okay…”

Ibia, who had a gloomy and timid personality, couldn’t quite believe that she suddenly had to come to the Knights Templar’s headquarters.

The previous day, the Royal Class’ student council president, whom she didn’t know really well, suddenly came to her and said that she needed her help with a very important job.

Obviously, it wasn’t a very difficult task. She even said that she might not have to do anything.

They were just going to meet someone, and if that person seemed to be unable to speak freely, she was supposed to ask her some questions telepathically. They were really easy questions like: “If you need help, do this and that”, “if you are getting tortured or something similar to it, do this and that”, and so on.

It wasn’t difficult at all, as she did those kinds of things until she got sick and tired of it in the supernatural power classes.

However, anyone would have been nervous when they suddenly had to apply their ability in a real-life situation. She couldn’t even believe that she might have to ask the daughter of the Commander of the Knights Templar if she was getting tortured while he stood right next to her.

Only Ceres van Owen and Ibia were present.

The student council president of the Royal Class stood in front of the headquarters of the Knights Templar with no hesitation apparent on her face—it was the place where the strongest paladins who had the greatest achievements in the Demon World War gathered.

Most students who majored in divine powers in Temple dreamed of entering the Knights Templar.

Faced with that, Ceres van Owen, not intimidated whatsoever, walked along the mighty colonnade and stood right in front of the gatekeeper.

“What is your business here, Temple student?”

Although it was the weekend, the two of them were wearing their school uniforms to show their affiliation.

“I’m Ceres van Owen, the student president of Temple’s Royal Class.”

She pulled out her student ID and smiled.

“It’s nothing serious; I’m just here to visit my friend Olivia Lanze, the daughter of the Commander of the Knights Templar. Could I see her for a moment?”

“Erm? The Commander is busy at the moment…”

“Please, can’t you ask him for me?”

Ceres had a bright smile plastered on her face.

“Olivia suddenly disappeared, and the students are wondering if she got kidnapped. There is quite a commotion going on in Temple.”

Ceres even added some slight pressure to her words, saying that she wanted to see that Olivia was safe with her own eyes.

* * *

The Commander of the Knights Templar was a busy person—he wasn’t someone one could just meet because one wanted to.

However, she wasn’t just a normal student of Temple, but the student council president of the Royal Class. Although her title didn’t hold much power outside of Temple, it made her hard to ignore, at least.

She even agreed to go to the Templar headquarters to make sure that the student that suddenly disappeared overnight was okay. She also added that there was already an uproar in Temple, so if she wasn’t able to see her with her own eyes, then they might take more drastic measures next time.

Therefore, without any intention of stepping down, Ceres, who had never been there before, managed to make them open the doors for her.

The Commander wasn't present at the moment, so Ceres and Ibia had to wait quite a long time in his office after they got escorted there.

"It's okay. Don't be nervous."

"Y-yes…"

Ceres comforted the nervous Ibia by holding her hand.

Just how long had they waited?

-*Clank*

The door to the office opened, and Riverrier Lanze entered the office with a cold expression on his face, Olivia Lanze following behind him.

Without having to ask a single question, both Ceres and Ibia were absolutely convinced about one fact.

There was something going on. Olivia's gloomy expression told them everything.

"It's an honor to meet you, Commander. I'm Royal Class' student council president, Ceres van Owen."

"I'm Ibia…"

"Nice to meet you. I'm Riverrier Lanze, the Commander of the Knights Templar."

After introducing himself briefly, the Commander sat Olivia down next to him and looked at the other two.

"I heard that you were worried because my daughter suddenly disappeared from Temple?"

"Yes. She disappeared without saying a word, so the other students went a bit crazy… Fortunately, we found you here. I thought something bad might have happened to you…"

“Aren’t I correct in the assumption that Temple students are allowed to leave on the weekends?”

“That is right. Still, it was just so sudden…”

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Like that, a vague back and forth started between Ceres and the Commander. He said that Olivia was in an unstable state of mind and body due to something that happened recently, so it would be difficult for her to continue her life at Temple.

That also correlated with Olivia’s recent behavior. However, the current situation didn’t seem voluntary at all but highly involuntary.

The Commander also added that Olivia wasn’t in any condition to meet people, so she didn’t want to talk to anyone, and that they should have confirmed that she was safe now. What he meant was that they should go back. On the other hand, Ceres asked if she could talk alone with Olivia, but was rejected.

Therefore, it was Ibia’s time to step up.

Ibia stayed completely still and focused all her mental power on her ability.

[Don’t be surprised, senior. I’m a telepath.]

Olivia flinched slightly, suddenly hearing a voice inside her head. Fortunately, the Commander didn’t notice it.

[Senior, are you currently unable to talk with us? If your answer is yes, touch your hair once.]

Olivia touched her long platinum blonde hair once with her right hand.

Ibia’s heart pounded.

[*If you are in need of help right now, please clench your fist.*]

Olivia clenched her right hand into a fist.

[Are you maybe suffering or… getting tortured?]

Olivia nodded her head subtly.

Ibia's complexion began to turn pale…

"Why is this student so nervous?"

And, of course, Riverrier Lanze seemed to have grasped her abnormal expressions.

"A-ah… Well, she is probably nervous because this is the first time she met the Commander of the Knights Templar."

"Yes, that's right."

However, it was impossible for him to notice that she was telepathically communicating with his daughter.

* * *

Around dinner time.

Grace had called for an emergency meeting again. This time, Ibia was also present. It seemed clear that they had grasped the situation.

Ibia was terrified, and Ceres' eyes were full of anger.

"It was true."

It didn't matter anymore who sent the anonymous letter.

Everyone was shocked at Ceres' words.

"They silenced the president with some kind of trick, but we are sure that she is getting tortured. She also asked for help."

Ibia telepathically confirmed Olivia's request for help.

"This is no longer a problem students can solve."

Eventually, this event began to grow in scale.

“This is already a serious crime.”

This news had to be delivered to the faculty as well as the guards.

Mine and Adriana’s eyes met.

After much effort, we managed to turn the case into an event that could move huge powers without revealing that it was us who put things in motion.

* * *

We had secured evidence that the Commander of the Knights Templar was torturing his daughter.

No matter if they were father and daughter, this was reason enough to mobilize Temple as well as the guards. As long as there was some proper justification as well as this testimony, Temple could take action right away—rather than being stuck unable to do anything as I had seen in the Preview.

It was Sunday night. Temple’s faculty—including the Royal Class’—moved in groups.

The teachers started to lead armed forces and the guards stationed at Temple to the headquarters of the Knights Templar.

I didn’t follow them.

However, with just that, I could confirm that we had succeeded in taking a completely different path.

“Reinhardt, you sure make things interesting.”

“……What do you mean?”

“You’re denying it, huh.”

Instead, I was watching the troops and teachers frantically taking off in the middle of the night together with Bertus on the terrace.

“It very much looked like you were running around trying to save Olivia Lanze somehow.”

Even though he had no clear evidence, it seemed like he guessed what I was trying to do by asking about Olivia and visiting her. Bertus seemed to have intuitively noticed that I was the cause for all the chaos.

It was more or less just a guess, but it was accurate enough that I got goosebumps.

“It sure is amazing that all of Temple started to move just because a little first-year did some groundwork.”

“I haven’t done anything, though.”

Bertus sipped on his tea and grinned.

“Although you’re saying that you didn’t do anything, wasn’t it you who said that they should bring someone with telepathic abilities to secure Olivia Lanze’s testimony?”

He already knew that much? It was seriously scary because it seemed like this guy knew nothing but also seemed like he knew everything.

I just couldn’t tell if he really knew everything.

“Anyway. Whatever the reason, I’m really happy that you’ve been running around so much trying to save Olivia Lanze.”

“…Happy? Didn’t you want to get rid of her?”

“That’s irrelevant now, isn’t it?”

Bertus was dumbfounded.

“The Knights Templar will be disbanded, so what does it matter now?”

What?

I think I just heard something pretty huge.

“I-isn’t that a pretty big deal?”

This incident was rather big, but was it enough to disband a huge group like the Knights Templar?

“In some cases, this might have been seen as a case of a parent abusing their child.”

Bertus giggled.

“But His Majesty has no intention of letting this end as just a small incident.”

They had an excuse.

So now they were going to smash them to pieces.

It might just be a small incident—but neither Bertus nor Charlotte—but the Emperor himself would intervene from then on, increasing the scale of the incident enormously.

“However, there’s no way that the Knights Templar will just accept this. There would be a lot of opposition from the religious community. So, in the worst-case scenario, the Knights Templar might end up aiming their sword at the Empire.”

They wouldn’t be able to completely disband them. The Knights Templar, which had already amassed a great deal of power, combined the powers of the Five Major Churches, so there was no way that they would let go of that power completely. If the Emperor tried to dismantle the organization under the pretext of this incident, they might point their swords at the Empire, calling the Emperor’s actions religious oppression.

“Congratulations, Reinhardt.”

Bertus patted me on the shoulder.

“You just started a war to save a single person.”

I felt my whole body freezing over.

What did he mean by war?

My brain seemed to have stopped working as soon as I heard that the act of saving Olivia Lanze might develop into a war between the Five Major Churches and the

Empire.

The Imperial Family was always sharpening their swords, waiting for the right moment to get rid of the eyesore that was the Knights Templar, and that conflict was growing even more heated after the incident with the black market.

That was where I had triggered this huge incident of the Knights Templar's Commander torturing his own daughter.

As Bertus said, I created a situation in which hundreds and thousands of people might die horribly because I wanted to save a single person.

Something like that.

Is something like that even possible?

Was everything I had done developing into such a tremendous situation? How was that possible? The only thing I did was follow them and instigate Temple to move with an anonymous letter, you know?

A war would happen just because of that?

As I sat there completely frozen, Bertus looked at me calmly.

"Do you want me to stop it?"

"Huh… Huh? What?"

"The war."

Bertus still looked at me.

"Are you going to stop it?"

"You seem to have a hard time dealing with this flow of events. Do you want me to stop it?"

Bertus looked at me, his face adorned with an unreadable expression.

"Yes."

I nodded my head blankly.

“Please.”

Bertus smiled at my short but sincere request.

“Okay.”

The future had changed.

It had changed on a huge scale.

However, it changed once again with just a short request.

* * *

It hadn’t been revealed that the Knights Templar’s Commander had tortured his daughter. Strictly speaking, they were still at a stage where they tried to convince her with words, but she knew that if she kept on denying them that she would be subjected to physical and magical torture.

Temple mobilized their forces, but with Bertus intervening, I believed that the Imperial Family took the initiative in this case.

The Imperial Family wanted to dismantle the Knights Templar, but if they did that, they would face tremendous backlash, so they reduced the case to a personal one, not a big scandal happening within the Knights Templar.

Instead, the Imperial Family seemed to demand that the current Commander be dismissed and insisted on the appointment of a new Commander who happened to be pro-empire.

While the Imperial Family was negotiating such things behind the scenes, Temple seemed to have decided to keep their mouth shut after asking for Olivia Lanze’s opinion on this matter. Olivia Lanze hadn’t been tortured yet, after all, so it would have been difficult to press any further charges.

Not long after, on Monday, Olivia Lanze returned to Temple.

She had decided to quit Temple and abandon her faith, but in the end, she was able

to return safely because she was a Temple student.

[Special Achievement – The Inflection Point of History (Olivia Lanze)]

[A character (Olivia Lanze) who should no longer exist in this world has survived.]

[The future has changed dramatically.]

[You have received 1000 achievement points.]

In addition to earning some achievement points, I got another reward for clearing a special quest.

[You have acquired Olivia Lanze's trait 'Sacred Spirit'.]

Trait : Sacred Spirit

Description : Olivia Lanze was born with enormous mental strength. Therefore, she had great resistance against magic that affected the mind. Sharing that trait with her, you have also acquired enormous mental strength. Your resistance to spells interfering with your mind has increased significantly.

The reward was much bigger than I had expected.

This might have been the reason why Olivia Lanze didn't fall until the end, even after getting brainwashed multiple times.

CHAPTER 116

Sacred Spirit.

I wasn't expecting it at all, but the reward was so huge that I was left wondering just what kind of situation I was in. Although it was only limited to mental interference, it was still a tremendous anti-magic skill that one could only receive after rigorous training.

Olivia Lanze returned safely, so there seemed to be a brief uproar among the seniors. As the incident didn't escalate, the details weren't spread among the students. The members of Grace didn't spread around anything about Olivia Lanze getting tortured either—probably because the teachers told them not to. Nothing got leaked.

The Imperial Family wanted to deal with this case quietly.

Adriana and the other members of Grace seemed to be crying out of joy and rejoicing about Olivia's safe return. I already confirmed that she was safe, so I didn't join that tear-filled reception.

I just took classes, ate dinner, and trained as usual.

"Reinhardt."

"Ah…"

However, Olivia Lanze came down to the first-year dormitory to meet me.

"Can I talk to you for a moment?"

Her expression was slightly gloomy but not as disastrous as the one I had seen her having in that potential future.

* * *

She suddenly came to me in the middle of the night and took me outside of Temple's dormitory. It was quiet around the Royal Class at night.

“I heard you played a huge part in my rescue.”

“…What? Actually, wasn’t it Ibia who did everything?”

“Yeah, I thanked that child as well. You have my thanks, Reinhardt.”

Adriana and I had come up with the plan, but in the end, Ibia’s telepathic ability played the most crucial part.

Olivia walked beside me without saying a word for quite some time. It felt more like we were taking a walk, as we weren’t going that fast.

“I thought it would be enough to quit Temple and abandon my faith. I wanted to live a quiet life without hurting anyone…”

Riverrier Lanze couldn’t give up on Olivia Lanze. It was why he tried to manipulate her to the point of completely destroying her, but when he discovered that mind interference magic and brainwashing didn’t work on her, he saw no other choice but to kill her. Her strong mind would have been her downfall.

“I guess I was just too naive.”

She thought he would let her go, but he didn’t. He locked her up and threatened her, and tried to make Olivia live like he wanted through torture and brainwashing.

Just what did she have to endure during her days of captivity? After only a few days, Olivia—who first seemed so gentle and friendly—exuded a lonely atmosphere.

“What are you going to do now in Temple?”

Olivia had been about to quit Temple. However, she was rescued from the Knights Templar because she was a Temple student.

“…Quitting Temple would be rather dangerous at the moment.”

“…Is that so?”

“Yes, I know too many things that I shouldn’t know.”

Olivia had discovered the secrets of the Knights Templar, the corruption within their

group, and just how horrifying they could be. She was rescued before they could harm her, but she saw too many things.

Without the protection of Temple, she would get taken away by them again—not to brainwash her, but to silence her.

In the end, she decided that she would remain in Temple, even if it was just to protect herself.

“Could we sit down for a moment?”

“Sure.”

After walking for a while, Olivia sat down on a bench, and I placed myself next to her.

A relaxing scent wafted over from both her body and hair.

“Are you… going to abandon your faith?”

“Yes.”

“You don’t have to be part of a group to have faith, right?”

Olivia Lanze didn’t say that she would simply give up on wanting to join the Knights Templar, but instead, she said she would abandon her faith itself. It wasn’t entirely impossible to believe in God all on your own. I wondered why she was trying to abandon her entire faith.

“I know what you’re trying to say.”

Olivia nodded and smiled slightly.

“Do you want me to show you something?”

“Show me what?”

-Glooow…

* * *

A group of bright, white lights danced in her right hand—it was the manifestation of her divine power.

“This is the power of Towan, the God of Purity.”

“Well… I guessed as much.”

“Why can such corrupt, impure people use this power?”

Olivia looked at me with sad eyes.

“Why can so many priests and paladins who act in violation of their faith and its doctrine use such strong sacred power?”

The Knights Templar was filled with priests and paladins that directly went against their doctrine and committed countless horrible crimes. However, their divine powers were still strong. They didn’t get judged or punished by the heavens.

“And why can I, after deciding to not serve Towan anymore, still wield this power?”

Although she rejected her faith, her divine powers still remained.

Oliva seemed to have too many questions.

“Divine power isn’t proportional to one’s faith, and one could still use it even if one didn’t live strictly by the doctrine.”

She was calmly saying things that could immediately earn her a visit from the inquisitors. It seemed that—as she saw those corrupt priests and the power they had—she began to question the Five Major Churches themselves.

“The Gods lend us power, but they don’t really seem to care what we do with it. That’s probably the reason why the Knights Templar that should have been smote down still exist.”

The Gods aren’t watching over us. They just lend us their power, but they don’t seem to care what we do with it.

“Then what use do all these prayers and hymns have if they aren’t even there to perceive them?”

After experiencing such helplessness and disappointment, Olivia eventually came to the conclusion that faith itself served no purpose. Those numerous sermons and teachings had nothing to do with the Gods whatsoever.

Olivia gave up her faith not only because of emotional reasons but because of logical ones as well. Anyway, I learned that one's divine powers would continue to be strong regardless of their faith.

"But who knows. Maybe it's just those Gods."

"…What?"

"Hm? I-it's nothing."

Olivia seemed to have said something rather strange, as if it was a slip of the tongue.

The Gods weren't interested in this world.

If so, the existence opposed to them, the Demon God, might be different, right?

That was probably what she meant. Why did she suddenly say something so dangerous? Olivia chuckled and shook her head as if to gloss it over so I couldn't ask her about it anymore.

It can't be.

Did she go over to the dark side?

"By the way, Reinhardt, why did you help me?"

Olivia asked me that as if she wanted to change the subject.

"I know that it was you and Adriana who wrote that letter."

"Ah… So you knew, huh?"

Everything went well, so all was good, but everyone seemed to have realized that it was us by the time I left the meeting. It seemed like Adriana confessed to everything.

That being said, Olivia came to know that the key people behind her rescue were

Adriana and me.

“Was it because Adriana asked you to?”

Olivia looked at me with a smile on her face.

It felt like my heart was about to explode. She was such a dazzlingly pretty person that I felt like my brain had stopped functioning. What was this? Was that really happening to me?

Olivia looked at me, smiled mischievously, and whispered.

“Have you fallen in love with me at first sight?”

“Wh-what?!”

No, what was that? Why did she ask that so suddenly?!

Honestly, I hadn’t fallen in love with her, but I felt like I was going to go crazy!

If I lowered my guard for even a second, I felt like my soul might get sucked out!

“Just kidding. Why are you so surprised?”

Olivia laughed while covering her mouth.

What’s that? After letting go of everything, you have also become able to say such weird things, yeah?

Olivia narrowed her eyes and suddenly brought her face closer to me.

She got closer to my ear, actually.

Then she whispered to me in a very soft voice.

“I told you I wouldn’t serve Towan anymore, you know?”

Priests of Towan weren’t able to get married. However, since she gave up on that faith, she was free to do whatever she wanted. Did she mean that?

Olivia continued to whisper in a strange voice.

“Of course, you’re still too young, Reinhardt. Maybe… When you’re in your fourth year?”

“Wh-what’s wrong with you!?”

Olivia looked back at me making a fuss.

“You see, I heard that it’s bad to be modest in such matters, so I think it’s better to be more honest with these things.”

Olivia smiled at me again while fiddling with her hair.

“Aren’t I pretty?”

Yeah, I did have to admit that. Honestly, I’d even call her the school’s greatest beauty. I mean, she wasn’t a child anymore, so that was fine; compared to her, my appearance was just too ordinary—it was more like I looked 1000 times uglier.

But her calling herself pretty… felt a little strange.

“W-well, yeah, but isn’t calling yourself pretty with your own mouth a little…?”

Her personality had blackened.

Her mindset also seemed to have blackened in various ways. Seeing that I disliked this, Olivia raised her lips up into a seductive smile.

Wow.

She wasn’t that kind of person originally, but now this saint that had her sensual sides locked away for many years had her seal lifted.

Wasn’t that a disaster in its own right?

Olivia pulled at me slightly.

“Anyway, thank you, Reinhardt.”

-Kiss

She kissed my cheek, making a wet noise.

“Let’s do even more things when you’re more grown-up, okay?”

“Ah.”

I was frozen in position for about ten seconds.

It was really like my brain froze over.

The corrupted and blackened saint became a vixen that flirted with a little first-year kid.

* * *

“…So, this is probably kind of a big problem.”

“Se-senior…?”

The next day, when I came out to do my morning training, I explained to Adriana what Olivia did last night. Her complexion turned completely white.

It seemed like her idol and role model’s personality suddenly made a 180-degree turn going far beyond just having forsaken her faith. Her behavior was more like she was saying: “I gave my fucking life to that doctrine of purity, so now I’m going to do everything I want!”

It was scary because she was pretty much a late bloomer with such things, and she was the most beautiful woman found in the Capital, so no one would reject her.

“Uhmm… A-although it’s a bit embarrassing… Shouldn’t you like that, junior?”

Adriana was shocked, but she said that I should have liked it if someone like Olivia—who was even called the Saint of the Eredian district—kissed me.

“I know she’s just teasing me, but because I know she is doing that, I don’t know how to deal with it when I’m right in front of her.”

I was sure she enjoyed watching me writhe in embarrassment. In fact, she probably thought of me as just a child. However, when she did those things, I didn't know what to do, leading to my brain to freeze.

The person that gave me resistance against mental attacks was attacking my mind!

"Well… What can you do? S-still, isn't it a good thing…?"

It seemed like Adriana was of the opinion that I should think of it more like a compliment if I couldn't handle it.

But.

How was I supposed to do that?

This was just too much for my poor heart. After running for some time, Adriana spoke up as if she had just remembered something.

"Erm… Senior said just now that she wanted to eat with you and me, junior… She seemed so happy."

"Ca-can I not go…?"

"No."

Adriana was adamant.

CHAPTER 117

To Olivia, Adriana and I were her life's saviors. Because the two of us had followed them, we had found out what was going on and were able to alert Temple with an anonymous letter.

Olivia was afraid of her foster father, so she couldn't do anything independently. It seemed that she had decided to stay with Temple to solve all her problems, including the ones with her parent.

In any case, she wasn't just troubled by personal matters; she was also a target of the Knights Templar and the believers of the Five Major Churches. Of course, they wouldn't be able to put their hands on her as long as she was a Temple student.

Anyway.

On Tuesday, after class, I went to Mainstreet with Adriana. Olivia seemed to be doing well in class by then; she knew that being a Temple student was her only way to survive, so she wouldn't go out of her way to cause any major problems.

"We'll have to wait a little. Senior takes more classes than we do, after all."

"Yeah, well. I guess so."

Adriana and the other members of Grace didn't seem to think that Olivia was a traitor just because she abandoned her faith. They actually started to question their own beliefs after hearing what Olivia had to suffer through and what she had been about to experience.

What if everyone in Royal Class suddenly ended up abandoning their faith or something?

"Anyway, how's she doing in the club?"

"Well, she doesn't pray anymore, but she still comes around."

"That's good."

It wasn't a place that strictly enforced faith anyway, so Olivia seemed to want to return to the club. However, it was strange for someone who abandoned her religion to be the club president of a religious club.

While we were killing time near the Main Street Tram stop, we soon saw Olivia getting off a tram.

"Oh, Adriana, Reinhardt. Did you have to wait long?"

"No, we arrived not too long ago as well, senior."

Olivia's Royal Class uniform looked so good that it seemed to have been made just for her. Naturally, she drew in all the gazes from the people passing by.

I hadn't been aware that Olivia was so famous, but everyone seemed to know her.

"Let's go."

Olivia grabbed our hands and started to walk.

"Wh-why do we have to hold hands…"

"Why? Do you not like it?"

No, we just didn't need to hold hands. I didn't like it because it felt like she was holding hands with a boyfriend rather than just a friend, you know?

The sharp stares of all the students stung my back. They seemed to think something like, *"What are you doing, holding Olivia's hand?"*

"N-no… It's not that I don't like it…"

"Then let's go!"

She even winked at me.

She was doing it on purpose! I was sure she was doing it on purpose!

The people's glares seemed to sting even more.

* * *

The three of us went to a restaurant Adriana liked and ate some pasta. It was a pretty good place.

“I’m… I’m not going to join the Knights Templar.”

“Well… You must have gotten confused because of me. I’m sorry.”

“N-no… You have gone through much worse, senior.”

Adriana also seemed like she had given up on joining the Knights Templar. It was already a well-known fact that the Commander changed, but they didn’t seem to expect that the group would change significantly. Those two would talk about many different things, and Olivia would say something to me from time to time as well.

“By the way, I heard that you had supernatural powers, Reinhardt. Is that true?”

“What? Ah, well… Yeah, it is.”

“What kind of power do you have?”

Olivia seemed to ask those things because she was surprised that I turned out to be a supernatural power user.

“Well, the power’s called Self-suggestion…”

“Self-suggestion? Is it self-hypnosis or something like that?”

“It’s similar.”

“What effect does it have?”

“It’s… It’s a little… vague. It’s like, if I give myself a certain suggestion, my body would be strengthened accordingly, or something…”

“Hmm…?”

That was my power’s biggest weakness.

“Anyway, if I believe that I can run really fast, I’ll end up actually being able to run faster… Yeah.”

I got a little embarrassed while explaining it.

Saying that my ability made me win as long as I kept a winning mentality was kind of embarrassing!

“Reinhardt’s ability was actually really helpful this time.”

“Oh? Was it?”

Adriana followed up, telling Olivia how we followed her and how I strengthened my hearing to eavesdrop on them, after which we decided to help.

Yes, my supernatural power certainly did play a role in it.

“I see. Thanks again, Reinhardt.”

“Yeah, well…”

Olivia seemed a little gloomy after remembering those things again, but then she thanked me.

“Well. looks like I can’t help it, Reinhardt.”

“What are you talking about?”

Olivia smiled at me bashfully.

“You’ll have to marry me after you graduate from Temple, okay?”

“What?!”

“Cough, cough!”

I exclaimed at her sudden proposal, and Adriana coughed for a bit with tears in her eyes—it seemed that she choked on her food.

“What are you talking about?”

“I have received so much grace from you, so it would only be polite to repay you for what I received, regardless of doctrine, faith, and morality.”

Olivia smiled softly. Goddamnit, that face was such a cheat; I couldn’t handle it. What did she mean by repaying me for everything she received?

“Reinhardt, you saved my life, so I’ll have to give you something of similar worth as my life. Isn’t that fair?”

Please.

If she kept on doing that, people might think she was serious.

“You’re going to forget people like me when you graduate from Temple, though.”

When I told her to stop talking bullshit, Olivia shook her head.

“I’m going to attend Temple’s Graduate School anyway, so I’ll stay in Temple until you graduate, Reinhardt. I’ll come to visit often~.”

Damn.

Originally, she planned to join the Knights Templar after graduating from the High School section, but since she decided to stay in Temple for a very long time, that girl would be there until I graduated from High School.

Adriana watched the senior she had admired freely flirting with a first-year boy. Her face was completely expressionless.

It looked like she wanted to deny reality.

“What’s the matter? Is there someone else you like? For example… Adriana?”

“Senior!”

Was she doing this to test me? Adriana squealed at her senior, telling her to not be ridiculous. Although she had decided not to join the Knights Templar, Adriana still served Towan, the God of Purity.

“What’s wrong, Adriana? Loosen up, loosen up and be more comfortable, like me.”

“I-I won’t!”

Olivia was trying to corrupt Adriana as well.

She had already become a complete heretic and let go of all the problems around her. If she were to be taken in by a heresy inquisitor and put on trial, she wouldn’t be able to say anything.

It seemed like Olivia became quite attached to Adriana and me.

Adriana was originally close to her, but they seemed even more intimate after that incident. Then there was me—it seemed that she found my reactions interesting, so she kept on teasing me.

Seeing her flirting in such an unbridled way, I wondered how she managed to endure it thus far.

I didn’t know how Adriana felt about it, but I was a man, so I felt like I was going crazy every time she suddenly hugged me or casually grabbed my hand. Rather, I felt like she was merely playing around with me and not seeing me as a man at all. That had to be why she was able to act without hesitation like that.

Harriet’s reactions were great, so I kept teasing her.

That was how it felt to be in her position. I felt like I was dying.

No, strictly speaking, I didn’t simply hate it. Rather than hating it, I felt complicated about it.

Because if I were to say, “I actually love you!” she would undoubtedly say something like, “I’m sorry… I didn’t think you would take this seriously. Sorry, I hurt you a lot, didn’t I…?”

I could see that development happening clear as day. I could never fall for those things.

“Today was fun. See you two at the club.”

“Yeah, yeah…”

“Have a safe trip, senior…”

I felt like I got my soul sucked out, and Adriana stared ahead foolishly for a different reason. Perhaps she was like that because she saw her senior, who she admired dearly, showing her depraved side all day long.

“I feel like a toy…”

“Senior… How were you able to endure for so long?”

Adriana seemed to admire Olivia for managing to suppress that personality of hers for such a long time.

* * *

Although the conflict between the Knights Templar and the Imperial family had yet to be resolved, Olivia would be fine for the moment. I didn’t end up joining ‘Grace’—I already gained the members’ trust without having to put my name in their roster, so nothing would change.

I didn’t want to cram even more things into my schedule. Of course, when the seniors from Grace saw me, they would greet me, especially Olivia, who found it very fun to tease me. As soon as she saw me, she would act all intimate.

She would do things like suddenly approaching and hugging me or stroking my hair and just walking off without saying anything. Even her kissing me on my cheek was a daily occurrence.

A pet or a toy.

That was my position.

Even more problematic was that she would do those things regardless of others being around or not.

That was how things had been going.

“…”

People who didn’t know me at all often looked at me with an expression that seemed

to ask, “What’s with this bastard?”. They couldn’t even touch her hand while I didn’t have to do anything to get such treatment.

– Although he pretends not to do these things, isn’t he actually flirting with every woman he meets?

-That’s right.

-What’s with this? Why is that bastard so close with all the girls? Even with the seniors, even though he has such a dirty personality.

-He’s only nice to girls. Unlike he is to us.

Those who knew me, mostly the guys in my class, started gossiping about me.

I wanted to say something, but I couldn’t actually refute any of it because it was technically true.

In the end, Bertus was the only male student I was somewhat close to in Class A.

And after I got closer to Ellen, Harriet, Charlotte, and Adriana, I grew close to Olivia, who was a far older senior.

I knew best that they wouldn’t listen to anything I had to say in that situation.

“Hey, erm… Reinhardt.”

“…What?”

Kono Lint came up to me and chirped.

“What’s your… secret?”

Besides those gossips, there was also someone who wanted me to pass on my’ secret method’ to him.

* * *

It was Thursday. Time for our common classes.

During our short break before lunch, while I was sitting quietly outside the class building where we had our common classes, Kono Lint suddenly approached me.

He whispered quietly to me as if he was asking for dirt on someone.

Even those guys behind me who had been gossiping about me waited for my answer with bated breath—although they were pretending like they weren't interested.

They couldn't stand me, but the reason for that might be because they were jealous. They were guys as well, after all.

"What do you mean by 'secret'?"

"How… How you only got close to girls."

The word 'only' was kind of offensive, but I couldn't deny it.

The secret method to get close to girls.

"I honestly don't know."

I really didn't know. In Harriet's case, I really only teased her at first. Harriet still went "Hmpf!" or "Tch!" when she saw me.

Ellen and I just happened to take the same classes, and honestly, we only became closer after eating together. Because it was only Ellen and me who would go for a bite, even in between meals.

Concerning Charlotte, she threatened me at first. Then things started to take one crazy turn after the other, and I became something like a letter courier for Charlotte and 'Valier'. So that was that.

Adriana's first impression of me was incredibly bad. She had thought I would one day end up head-first in a concrete floor, so she got closer to me to stop me from doing stupid things simply because she was such a nice person.

Olivia's case was a little special, but everything had happened partly because of Adriana, so I didn't really mean for it to happen.

Honestly, I hadn't actually meant to get close with any of the girls I was close with.

So, how could I answer a question like, “How does one get close to girls?” Simple, I couldn’t answer. I had no clue either.

Kono Lint seemed to think that I didn’t answer him because I didn’t want to tell him, not because I actually didn’t know.

“Ah, anything’s good, so just tell me something, please?”

Among the three useless brothers, Erich and Cayer were the ones who had shit personalities; Kono Lint, however, was only similar in competence to them. Kono wasn’t actually all that bad—he was just very interested in his female classmates.

That guy’s tenacity was really a force to be reckoned with. He even went to ask the crazy bastard Reinhardt himself.

“Who do you even want to get close to, huh?”

“H-huh?”

When I asked him that, he seemed embarrassed. Asking him who he wanted to get close to was almost the same as asking him who he liked.

“Huh… Rather than being interested in someone specific… I-I’m just, uhm, asking… That’s it.”

Rather than being interested in someone specifically, he answered quite vaguely. An expected answer because that was just the kind of guy he was.

I wasn’t a dating master, I was single, actually, but I still ended up in that situation somehow!

That bastard was talking to the wrong guy. I was able to act like that in front of those girls because they were nothing more than kids to me, and I was treating them as such. I couldn’t do shit in front of an adult woman like Olivia.

I was actually a completely different person in front of adult women. I was just comfortable with our classmates because they were kids…

Huh?

Was that it?

"…Can't you just treat them more comfortably?"

I didn't see them as women, so I was able to treat them like any other person. Was that the right way?

"Comfortably?"

"Yes, you bastard. If you approach them with weird intentions, it's all too obvious. Just empty your brain and talk to them."

"Empty your brain?"

"If you're hungry, just ask them to eat together."

That was what happened with Ellen.

"If you have something to say, just say it. Don't falter."

That was what happened with Harriet.

"If you think they need help, just help them."

Although it was a little different, that was what happened with Charlotte.

"Just do it like that. If it doesn't go well, then it didn't go well. No big deal. Wouldn't it make them feel more reluctant to be close to you if you act all nervous and insincere?"

I didn't know if that was correct.

That was how it was for me.

"O-oooh… So that's how it was…?"

However, Kono Lint was taking my words seriously, as if I was a love guru explaining a secret strategy to him.

I felt like I should've just kept my mouth shut.

CHAPTER 118

After Lunch.

Kono Lint went straight into action—he headed right towards a certain someone preparing for her next class.

“Hey, Grantz.”

“Huh, what?”

His target was Liana de Grantz. Was he thinking about getting closer to Liana?

However, I didn’t know if that was the best choice. She was the female version of me after all, you know?

“Hey, would you like to go eat something together with me after class? There’s a good new shop on Mainstreet.”

What the hell? I didn’t know what to say either.

He just looked like he was openly flirting with her.

“…With you?”

Sure enough, she completely looked like she wanted to say something like, “Why do I have to eat while looking at your ugly mug?”

Wow, although it was happening to someone else, I felt even more ashamed. Erich and Cayer couldn’t even look at the scene because they felt similarly to me.

“H-huh?”

“We have P.E. next. I’m too tired to even move after that.”

“Ah… Okay. Yeah, come to think of it, that’s true!”

Kono Lint was as stiff as a creaking wooden doll. He turned around, returned to his seat, and sat down.

Ah.

I already knew that it wouldn't go well, but seeing it directly like that made it hard to bear for me.

* * *

After some time.

"…It didn't work."

Before P.E., Kono Lint came up to me, whispering under his breath again in the locker room. I could also feel Erich and Cayer paying keen attention to our conversation.

"Well, first of all, what you did wasn't natural at all. It was no wonder that when you ask someone out for dinner like that, they would ask, "Why?". It probably felt burdensome."

There was more!

Natural, huh. I didn't even know what natural meant anymore. Was it really natural to just ask someone out to eat or to go out to play? How does one even do that?

I was confused.

Of course, Ellen was actually the one who'd asked me out to eat at that point, and if I asked her to go play, I was somewhat sure that she would come.

If it was Harriet, she would say something like, "Why should I do that with you?" However, if I forcefully dragged her along, she would let herself get dragged—even though she would grumble.

That was only possible after I built some kind of relationship with those two. Kono Lint wasn't close to our female classmates to begin with.

We had to start from zero, but how could one act naturally with zero progress? I mean, I wasn't even good at that either.

I was just lucky. So I wouldn't know how to do it again if someone asked me to.

"What are you talking about so secretively?"

Bertus approached me with a smile after he finished changing his clothes.

"No, well, he wants to know how to get close to the girls…"

"S-stop!"

Kono Lint covered my mouth when I tried to say something, but Bertus had already heard everything.

"Ah… So you were in the middle of consulting him?"

Bertus had a subtle look on his face as he looked at Kono Lint. His expression looked quite ambiguous.

"That… There are probably more important issues… No. Don't mind it. Cheer up."

-Pat, pat

Bertus patted Kono Lint on the shoulder with a knowing attitude and then left the locker room.

"…To be honest, I'm not completely sure, but I think your target is simply the wrong one."

Harriet and Liana, who both had a prickly side, would probably answer with "Why should I?" when approached like that. He'd get the same reaction no matter what.

In Class A, Ellen might go along with him if he were to ask her out to eat, and types like Adelia might agree as well.

When I told him to try someone else, he nodded and said that he would give it a try, regardless of him liking Liana or not.

* * *

During P.E., Kono Lint was busily wandering around during our breaks.

No, how many people was he flirting within a single day? Weren't you supposed to take your time? Did he want to be portrayed as a philanderer?

"No."

"Ah, I see."

Ellen refused sharply when Kono Lint asked her if she had some time later. He skipped Harriet because the results were rather obvious without having to try. Then he approached Adelia, who was completely exhausted because of the continuous physical training.

How would it go with Adelia, who would probably go along with it after hesitating for a bit?

Kono Lint started by handing her a water bottle instead of immediately badgering her.

"Oh, ah… Thank you…?"

Adelia smiled slightly when Kono Lint suddenly showed her some kindness by handing her a water bottle.

"Are you tired?"

"Ye-yes… That's right."

"After P.E., would you like to go out to drink something cool together?"

"…Huh?"

At Kono Lint's shamelessness, Adelia just smiled apologetically.

"Ah… I'm sorry, I planned to go buy some magic tools together with Harriet later. Let's eat together some other time."

"Oh, I-is that so? Then it can't be helped. Ha, hahaha!"

Adelia refused him as well, but at least she tried to not hurt him too badly.

Kono Lint—who created some kind of record and got dumped by all the female students of Class A except for Harriet in a single day—came back to the male students completely deflated.

It was truly a hard to watch sight, so Cayer, Erich, and I couldn't look at him properly.

"I-I got dumped by everyone, Reinhardt… Well, Adelia said that she would eat with me later… Is she actually interested in me?"

"No, she was just saying that. Don't believe it."

"As expected…"

The boy sat down next to me, his expression seeming as if his soul had left his body.

"Ah… Well, most of them had plans already… So that couldn't be helped…"

I was unusually careful with my words because if I rebuked him too harshly, he might fall into a serious depressive state.

I didn't really like that guy, but more than not liking him, I pitied him.

"H-hey, is that even the right way? Just asking them to go out to eat with me normally… That's the wrong method, isn't it?"

Kono Lint threw me some resentful looks. He seemed to believe that I gave him some strange method which was actually to blame, not himself.

W-well… Seeing it play out right before my eyes, it really seemed to be the wrong way to go about it. When a guy they weren't even close with suddenly asked them to go and eat together, they would be kind of at a loss for words.

Still, shouldn't they be a little more understanding and be more like, "If there's an opportunity, sure, let's eat something together!" or something?

"W-well… It doesn't seem to be the right method, I think… yeah."

I could invite Ellen or Harriet out to eat without a problem, but Adelia was scared of me, so she would probably cry and run away. I don't think I would be able to invite Liana.

“Hey, Reinhardt…”

“…What?”

Kono Lint fell into despair, but it didn’t seem like he had given up yet.

“Can’t you demonstrate?”

“W-what do you mean by demonstrate?”

He wanted to see the demonstration of an actual ‘pro’.

I’m not Casanove! How did this happen?!

“P-please, just show it to me once. Pleeeaase.”

Kono Lint, who got mentally damaged slightly due to my wrong instructions, was seriously about to grab at my pant leg. I thought those guys absolutely hated me. Kono Lint. They might brand you as a traitor, you know?

Did he want to do something like share his girlfriend with his two friends?

“No, I’m not even that skilled in those kinds of things.”

Ah.

Come to think of it, that’s right.

Would they bother me less if I let them see me get dumped? I didn’t want to be treated as some kind of casanova.

“Sigh… Yeah, see, I’m no different from you.”

If they saw me flirting and getting dumped right in front of their eyes, they wouldn’t be able to call me a playboy who would only hang out with women.

So I reluctantly got up from my seat and headed to the girl who was most likely to do me that favor.

I turned to Liana de Grantz sitting on a bench drinking some water. She seemed

exhausted.

"…Hey."

"…What? I'm tired."

Liana looked at me as if she didn't even want to bother talking to me. She certainly looked worse than before P.E.

"Want to go eat something after you're done?"

"…?"

I didn't do anything different from what Kono Lint did. She wasn't really in a good mood so she'd definitely reject me…

"…I'm not really hungry, but I really want to drink something cool."

Huh.

What?

This wasn't what I wanted.

What's with this?

Why did I succeed?

Even after exercising so hard, which should have put her in a worse mood, she gave me that kind of response to my sudden question.

I thought she would reject me no matter what, telling me that she didn't want to move anymore because she was exhausted from P.E.

Liana asked me to see her in the classroom after P.E., then she went off. Feeling like I got possessed by some ghost, I returned to Kono Lint.

"How did it go?"

"Huh? Ah, well… She said she wasn't really hungry… But wanted to drink something

cool with me…"

"Wha-what?"

Kono Lint, as well as the other guys who eavesdropped on us, seemed skeptical. They also seemed to think that I would get rejected after they saw Liana in such a bad mood.

"What did you do?"

"I-I don't really know? I didn't do anything different. I just said, "Want to eat something?"…That's all."

I was actually the one most baffled about it.

I went to her, who was the most prickly in our class, while she was in a really bad mood, and I didn't act any different from Kono Lint, so I had thought I would get rejected without a doubt. The situation was even more unfavorable than before.

Kono Lint started whining to me again to tell him my secret, and I couldn't even say anything to him.

* * *

Like that, I tried showing them that I had no actual skills to seduce women by getting rejected, but I failed, so as a result, that misunderstanding got aggravated.

And, incidentally, I went on a date with Liana de Grantz, which I hadn't really planned to do.

Of course, we were only going to drink something cool after school.

"I don't want to go all the way to Main Street. Let's go somewhere nearby."

"Okay."

After P.E., Liana and I decided to go to a place close by rather than going to the main street. What was going on? Wasn't she completely uninterested in me?

Did she like me?

Although I asked her out, I still felt somewhat uncomfortable. Of course, we weren't really talking much.

We also had a canteen inside the class building, but we opted to go to a nearby street where some cafes were located and sat down at one of their terraces.

I could feel those three idiot brothers tailing behind us.

"Why are they following us?""

"…Who knows?"

Liana also noticed them because they were tailing us so clumsily. Ah, those guys were called incompetent for a reason. Liana ordered a yogurt smoothie, and I ordered an iced lemon tea.

Those three also sat down at a table on the terrace quite far away from us, watching us.

Liana didn't seem to care that much that they were following us.

"Haah… I'm so exhausted from P.E."

She said that her whole body felt stiff as she drooped in her chair. She drank her yogurt and didn't really seem like she actually held any interest in me.

She seemed about to go back because she was so exhausted.

"Isn't it strange that you're still having such difficulties? Shouldn't you get used to this by now?"

Although it had only lasted one semester, we had to do that hard training twice a week. It was actually more surprising that she was still struggling so much. Well, those who had no combat talents usually would still struggle, I guess.

At my words, Liana glared at me.

"It's because you're working out every morning."

"…Is that so?"

She knew that I was training at dawn. I thought only those who came to exercise in the morning knew. Those two training sessions a week would improve one's basic physical strength, but it would still be difficult.

"Why do supernatural power users even need physical strength? The same goes with those magic majors… But you're also a supernatural power user. No, but your supernatural power is used to strengthen your body."

Liana continued to grumble that she didn't have any use for something like physical strength.

"It still has its advantages. Didn't your physical strength improve?"

"…You sound like a teacher. How annoying."

Liana didn't even look at me, saying that she was tired of talking about that.

I didn't really think that she was interested in me, so why did she go there with me in the first place? I mean, I also went there with her while not being interested in her. Nothing was bad about it.

"I'm curious about something."

"About what?"

"When Kono Lint asked you out earlier, you refused."

"Yeah. I did."

Then why did she come when I asked her out? I said the exact same thing as him, but you actually accepted my invitation.

This seemed a bit like I was bragging, but I was really curious. What was the difference between us?

"Oh, are you curious why I did that?"

"So to speak."

"…You don't know?"

No, why would I have asked then? Would I ask something I already knew? Liana took a sip from her yogurt then folded her arms.

“Oh, you really don’t know.”

She thought I knew, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world, so she found it strange that I didn’t know.

“If you don’t know, you don’t need to know.”

“What?”

“It’s fine.”

Liana didn’t say anything more to me.

* * *

Eventually, I returned to Royal Class’ dormitory with Liana without finding out the reason.

We didn’t really talk about anything important other than our classes and things we found hard.

“How was it? What did she say?”

Kono Lint glanced at Liana as she was returning to her room with a curious expression on his face. If that idiot actually liked Liana, he wouldn’t have reacted like that. I guess he was just flirting with girls because he found it fun or something.

“What we talked about? Mostly about how P.E. was difficult and stuff like that.”

“Strange… What’s the difference between you and me?”

Liana seemed to have a distinct reason for her actions, but when she had found out that I had no idea, she didn’t want to tell me.

That made me even more curious, that punk.

“And, dude, why did you follow us?”

“No… I was just… curious…”

“She might think you’re even a creeper, so be more careful.”

Kono Lint kept on asking me if I had any special skills he didn’t know about, and then at the moment I was about to tell the guy to fuck off…

“…Are you guys still talking about this?”

Bertus looked at me and Kono Lint alternately with a slightly exhausted expression.

“Sigh… There’ll be no end to this, huh? You two, follow me.”

Bertus dragged the two of us to our usual terrace. Kono Lint seemed a little anxious that he was called out by Bertus just for something like this.

“Lint, you’re curious why Reinhardt is so friendly with the female students, right?”

“Huh… so to speak.”

“You’re wondering if Reinhardt has some special technique or method or something similar, right?”

“Ah, well.”

Kono Lint was ready to grovel in front of Bertus if he told him that “technique”.
Bertus covered his eyes with his right hand and sighed slightly.

What?

Did this guy know a secret I didn’t know about? The reason why I attracted girls like that?

“Lint, don’t get hurt, okay?”

“Yes. I won’t get hurt.”

Bertus lowered the hand he used to cover his eyes and directly looked at Kono Lint.

“Reinhardt is handsome.”

His eyes were filled with pity.

“That’s it.”

There was no other reason. Bertus went straight to the point, wrapping it up.

CHAPTER 119

I didn't really think much about my own appearance because I was able to change it whenever I wanted with Sarkegaar's ring.

When I had originally set my appearance with it, I had made sure to make it so that I wasn't too ugly. I didn't make it so that I was so handsome that I could turn heads wherever I went, but I definitely had a handsome face. Until then, I had been living without thinking too much about it.

When Bertus had seen me consulting Kono Lint, he had told him that there was instead a more fundamental thing that he should take care of, although he had stopped his advice midway through.

He didn't say something like, "This doesn't have anything to do with something he does or says. Reinhardt is just handsome…" because he was afraid that it would hurt Kono.

Even so, Kono Lint tried to make something work that he wouldn't be able to pull off, so Bertus had told him directly.

"…S-so that's what it was…"

"Well, I'm not saying that you're ugly, Lint. Reinhardt is just… very handsome."

Kono Lint's mouth hung open; he was completely speechless.

I didn't need rhetorics or special methods.

'Reinhardt' was just handsome, so it was only natural that Kono Lint—who was comparatively less handsome—didn't get the same results.

I mean, it was obvious that a snake wouldn't get different results even if it tried to act like a stork.

"By the way, Reinhardt, it's a bit strange that you didn't notice this at all either. Have you never looked in a mirror?"

“Huh… What do you mean?”

“Haaah… Although you got into a lot of conflicts with your classmates, you still kind of get along in the end. I think your face plays a role in that.”

I-is that what it was?

Did my appearance really play such a large role without me noticing?

Was that the reason why Liana, who wasn’t really interested in me, still came along with me when I asked her out?

If I were really ugly, I would have already been treated unfavorably and completely ignored by the time I started teasing Harriet, but we were still on talking terms—was that because of my appearance-buff?

Then what about Adriana?

One’s appearance seemed to be more important than I thought…

Even if I wasn’t a super handsome man, I should have felt relieved that I set my face up to be handsome enough. Kono Lint remained silent for quite some time, then he turned his gaze towards me.

To be exact, he was kind of staring at me.

“Reinhardt…”

“…What?”

“You’ll be every man’s enemy from now on.”

“What are you even saying?”

“Somehow, this guy who has such a terrible personality still manages to talk with all the girls! In the end, it was all because of your face, you fucker!”

Kono Lint jumped up in anger and shouted.

“I-I can’t accept someone like yooooooou!”

He was making such a fuss that I couldn't even get angry at him. Rather, the situation was kind of funny.

No, I mean, if Bertus knew that this was because I was handsome, shouldn't he have noticed as well? Didn't he have eyes? It was kind of ridiculous that he was acting as if he found out about that only then.

"Huh… What's wrong with that idiot?"

"What else but him being innocent and pure?"

Bertus laughed as he said something rather uncharacteristic of him.

Anyway.

Starting the next day, the three idiot brothers' hostility towards me grew even stronger.

* * *

'Reinhardt' was already pretty famous because of that duel with the senior at the start of the first semester. And, although it was originally supposed to be a duel with a second year, in the end he had to fight their champion, a third-year. He became even more famous because that champion lost hard against him.

That was a pretty positive image.

However, the atmosphere had changed subtly, as he was often seen hanging out with someone as famous as Olivia Lanze.

Who's that guy? What's with him?

That was what most people were thinking.

Olivia had walked the path of a priest of Towan, the god of purity. Therefore, there had never been any kinds of scandals surrounding her, although she had been subject to a lot of attention. Of course, it was publicly known that she had abandoned her faith, then questions about this man named 'Reinhardt'—who suddenly began to seize all of Olivia Lanze's attention—had started to be raised.

Of course, there was some hostility mixed in that curiosity. That subtle hostility towards 'Reinhardt' wasn't isolated to the first-years; it also rose up to the higher grades.

There were some clubs in the Royal Class—the largest one of them was a religious club called 'Grace', but there were many other smaller clubs, although there were only a few.

Among them, there was one called 'Monthly Royal Class', a journalism club that published newspapers every month which consisted of only three people.

Of course, a monthly newspaper published by only three people didn't really garner any attention from the students of Royal Class. Now, if we consider the faithfulness of the content when compared with the 'Temple Times', a media club belonging to the central clubs encompassing the entire middle school section, it was on the lower side. That club also had more than 50 members. No matter how special the Royal Class was, their sales number was absolutely lacking.

The content of the Monthly Royal Class was mostly just a summary of the Temple Times content or vague gossip—they were just trivial things such as who didn't get along with whom, who seemed to have a crush on whom, or popularity rankings divided by class.

However, no matter how indifferent everyone was towards it, it was still a really important matter to the members of the club.

What topics should they include in their newspaper? What news was circulating these days? What were people interested in?

However, all their featured articles they planned to publish went to nothing. The hot topic of the Royal Class at the moment was Olivia Lanze's renunciation of her faith and Reinhardt, her new favorite.

"Everyone has a skeleton or two in their closet."

"Of course."

And the president of the Monthly Royal Class, who was a fourth-year, Layton Zabry, hated the sudden rise of Reinhardt.

The other two were the same.

They even doubted that it wasn't him who corrupted the Saint of the Eredian district. Although the reason was something completely different, to those who didn't know the details about the incident, it was wholly possible for them to infer that Olivia gave up her faith because of the man named Reinhardt. In fact, Olivia had never treated anyone like she treated Reinhardt.

"Look into him. If you find any dirt on him, sink your teeth in it."

"Let's show him the power of the media."

"Yeah!"

These three were people who should never get involved with the creation of a newspaper.

* * *

Except for the president, the other two members were dispatched to Year 1's Class A and B respectively to investigate the man called Reinhardt. They then talked to whoever they managed to catch, interviewing them.

They weren't rejected, as they were seniors.

"Reinhardt? Ah, he's my friend. He's really hardworking."

They interviewed Bertus first. His answer was rather simple.

The next one they caught to ask what kind of person Reinhardt was, was Kono Lint.

"…They say he's pretty handsome, but honestly, I don't really know. Tch, that parasitic bastard…"

Kono Lint, who praised 'Reinhardt' without realizing it, told them that he didn't want to think about it any further.

The third-year student, Edian—who was in charge of questioning Class A—had never actually seen that Reinhardt guy, so he added the question "Do you think Reinhardt is handsome?" to the list of questions.

"…I don't know."

That was Ellen's answer to if she thought Reinhardt was handsome.

Then she was asked what kind of guy Reinhardt was.

"…"

Ellen pondered for a long time about this question before she eventually gave him an answer.

"I don't know."

After Ellen answered, she turned around and went on her way.

"He's such a bad guy! I don't even want to think about him! He's bragging about being a beggar and is soooo annoying! He keeps bothering me!"

That was what the first-year Harriet de Saint-Owan said. Thinking that he had found some dirt, he started asking her more. She definitely hated Reinhardt.

"How exactly is he bothering you?"

"Eh… What? Oh, well… What do you mean? Why are you asking?"

"Oh, I'm a member of the 'Monthly Royal Class'. We're going to do a special segment about Class A's Reinhardt."

Harriet looked surprised at his words.

"Ah… So what do you want to ask me?"

"Then. How is he? Do you think Reinhardt… is a bad person?"

Harriet looked around and lowered her voice to make sure no one heard what she was about to say.

"Well… I don't think he's necessarily bad… I got a lot of help from him recently… That… That… I-I don't know anymore… He's a bad guy… but he isn't too bad…"

“I-is that so? Then I heard that Reinhardt was handsome. What do you think?”

“Y-yes?! T-that beggar? Handsome? How is he handsome? I-I g-guess he isn’t th-that ugly a sight… Aaargh!

Harriet uttered some nonsensical gibberish before disappearing as if she was running away.

The next interviewee was No. A-5 Cliffman. He said that he met him often because he was always practicing in the training hall but never actually talked to him before.

“…He’s got a mean personality, but he’s sincere. I consider him someone with a lot of guts. Seeing him keep going after getting beaten up so badly like that every day…”

Cliffman Highly praised Reinhardt’s tenacity to continue training despite getting defeated by Ellen so overwhelmingly every day. Cliffman evaluated his appearance as okay.

Next was Cayer Vioden.

“That crazy guy… Wait a minute. You said you were asking this for your monthly edition, right? Then what I’ll say will be printed in a newspaper, right?”

“Right.”

“Then I didn’t say anything.”

Cayer thought that if Reinhardt found out later that he said anything, he’d get beaten up, so he just threw him out.

Then he met Liana de Grantz.

“Is he handsome? Well… I think so.”

“Is there anything else?”

“He had a huge influence on the last group mission. His personality is a bit weird, but it’s rare to find people who don’t dislike someone hardworking, right? So rather than thinking that he’s handsome, I feel like everyone kind of acknowledged him for that… I’m not really close to him, so I don’t really know him that well.”

It seemed that Liana had a moderate degree of favor for Reinhardt.

Then he met Erich de Lafaeri.

"…I don't really know a lot about him, but I think you would be better if you don't interview Reinhardt himself."

"Why? After interviewing his classmates, I was planning on interviewing Reinhardt as well."

"With his personality, he'll probably go crazy."

"No way… He wouldn't do that to a senior, right?"

"Did you forget that his duel opponent was in his third year?"

"Ah."

That was the moment he realized that it probably wasn't a good idea to interview Reinhardt personally.

CHAPTER 120

Class B's coverage went better than Class A's. Most of the guys didn't know Reinhardt that well, so it was Charlotte, Louis Ankton, Scarlett, Delphine, and Ludwig giving some answers.

"Although he can be a bit old-fashioned, he's a good friend. He can be kind and knows how to help those in need. He was also ranked first during the midterm exams. In our last group mission, he even helped our class, who were supposed to be his opponents. He is rather strange, but you'd also get to like Reinhardt as soon as you get to know him. Appearance? Well… He's definitely handsome."

The Princess, Charlotte de Gardias, praised him highly.

"…I thought he was a bully at first. He definitely is one."

Those were the words of Louis Ankton. When asked if he could give some more details, he said that he didn't want to get caught and ran off.

"…I often find myself being jealous of him because he has a lot of things I lack. Namely, courage… I think he's a good person. I want to get closer to him, but… I don't have the courage."

Scarlett answered vaguely.

"I don't know him that well, but I think he's a good guy."

That was Delphine Izadra's answer.

"Reinhardt? I think he's a great guy! He's hard-working, smart, and can use his ability really well, you know?"

Ludwig answered cheerfully.

* * *

The club president Layton Zabry, who reviewed the results of the interview in their

club room, pulled a very strange face.

“…I can't tell if his reputation is good or bad."

"Wasn't it good enough?"

"No, it's good, but I heard that those that didn't like him ran away without saying anything, right?"

Certainly, most answers were positive in nature, but there were some that didn't dare answering—afraid that they might get harmed.

"And even among the positive answers, they all said that his personality was bad… So that bastard was actually a villain whom his classmates were scared of."

In fact, there were many people who mentioned that Reinhardt had a rather bad personality.

How notorious was Reinhardt for his victims to run and refuse to answer when they heard they would publish their statements in a monthly newspaper?

Èrich even warned them that if they were to go interview Reinhardt in person, he would react very harshly.

"This… this guy isn't your regular bully."

The president shook his head, convinced that Reinhardt wasn't your regular crazy bastard.

"Really?"

"Hmm… But I think there were more people who liked him, though…?"

"Ah, who cares about that?"

Layton chuckled.

"Even if he wasn't that kind of guy, we just have to make others believe that he is."

The pen was mightier than the sword!

Even if he wasn't like that, those words would get deeply embedded in people's hearts.

* * *

“…What? A newspaper?"

"Yes."

When I heard about that when I had dinner with Ellen, I wondered what it was all about. It seemed that some senior went around Class A asking about me.

I had no idea they did something like that because I was training outside. What was going on? Why were they digging up information on me? How are they going to use that?

"He asked me what kind of person you were."

“…Why did he ask that?"

"Don't know."

This was weird.

Why did those seniors who I didn't even know cover my life in their newspaper? Anyway, I was royally pissed because my neck hurt from all these weird looks I got. Still, I didn't want to cause any more trouble, but even if I wanted to, I couldn't just barge into those seniors' club.

It was also my first time hearing about something like a newspaper club. However, it was clear that they went around here and there to ask questions. It seemed they also asked Ellen some questions.

"So, what did you say?"

"I couldn't answer."

No, did she mean that she couldn't say anything even when we had so much contact with each other?

Ellen seemed to ponder a long time about this, then she tossed a question at me.

"What kind of person are you?"

"Huh?"

What? If she asked me those kinds of things so suddenly, I could only draw blanks.

What kind of person was I?

"Huh… Come to think of it, I don't know either."

I didn't know how I could describe myself. Ellen seemed to think about it from a similar point of view but couldn't come to a conclusion.

"Let's just keep on doing what we've been doing."

I held my training sword, and Ellen also faced me holding hers.

It was a bit annoying, but once I meddled with what those seniors were doing, I'd just get served a feast of nonsense.

* * *

It was June.

The first weekend of June.

Editions published by the Royal Class club' Monthly Royal Class' that almost no one knew about were placed in the lobby of each class.

Most people knew that there would be something about me published in that newspaper, so everyone took one with them as soon as it came out, and I, who was rather curious and concerned, also took a copy of it and opened it in the lobby.

I skipped all the small details and only looked for my segment.

[Celebrity Special – What kind of person is Reinhardt, Royal Class' A-11?]

"…"

Now, this Demon Prince even made it into the Royal Class' internal newspaper.

It was such a ridiculous situation in more ways than one.

[Reinhardt, the first year that has been a hot topic in Royal Class lately, just who is he? We strive to uncover this truth…]

What truth are they talking about? Did they think I'm some evil mastermind?

No… Actually, if my true identity is revealed, not only Temple but the whole Empire would get overturned.

It felt like those guys did a lot of research about me. They even wrote that I wasn't from some noble family but just a beggar from the streets. They mentioned that I had a supernatural power as well.

Of course, those things weren't really secrets.

[…*Many students praised Reinhardt, but we were able to read between the lines of their statements…]*

*"…*What?"

[…*We were able to find out that a significant number of students were actually afraid of him. An interviewee who shall remain anonymous clearly described Reinhardt as a 'gangster'.]*

*"…*Which bastard wrote this?"

Was I a gangster? Well, yeah, it could be thought of like that. I went around doing this and that, after all.

In the end, the segment's content didn't confirm any specific criticism about me, but one could definitely deduce from it that I was a bad guy based on the fact that there were several people who refused to give any statements—scared that I would retaliate.

No, what the hell?

I could clearly see that they wanted to paint me as a bad guy, you know? They

deliberately picked at my shortcomings and went on about them.

Ultimately, the purpose of the article was to paint Reinhardt as a type of bad guy that was an object of fear for his classmates.

They even evaluated me as a playboy who only conversed with women because I only got a good reception from the female students.

After reading that part, I got a slight idea of what it was all about.

They were just the petty actions of some seniors that didn't like me getting close to Olivia Lanze. Otherwise, there was no reason for those seniors a few years older than me to do something ridiculous like that.

"…"

I could feel the other people who read the newspaper in the lobby slowly turning their eyes towards me.

Fuck.

That bastard's going to cause trouble again.

That was what their expressions were saying.

"Hey bastards, if you look at me like that, you make it seem like this fucking article is true!"

As I shouted that, I could feel the atmosphere becoming even chillier.

"…Damn it."

What I shouted more or less proved that the article was true.

"That's why you're getting criticized like that. Idiot."

Harriet laughed while covering her mouth when she saw my red face. It seemed like she was pleased that a malicious article about me got published.

"Hey, did you tell them that I was a gangster?"

"What? I-It wasn't me! I didn't say anything!"

Harriet seemed shocked and shook her head.

"It was you for sure."

"No! It's not me! You dummy! I-I… I was just trying to help you!"

Harriet just rushed back into her room with red eyes, huffing and puffing all the way there.

Seeing that she was so disappointed, it was clear that she wasn't the one.

…I should apologize.

I really have to apologize for this.

* * *

Eventually, I called Harriet into my room and apologized to her for saying those things. She must have been really upset because I could see that she seemed to have cried a little. Her eyes were red and puffy, so I really wanted to pinch those cheeks of hers.

* * *

Of course, I didn't do that because I thought she wouldn't forgive me for that for the whole week. Instead, I took her to the dormitory-adjacent terrace and sat her down.

She didn't even look me in the eyes, keeping her head turned and saying, "Hmpf!"

"You were really too much."

"I'm sorry. So what did you say?"

When I asked her that, her face turned red because of a different reason.

"I-I don't know… I didn't say anything."

…She definitely complimented me, not slandered me.

The guilt I felt grew even heavier.

"By the way, what are you going to do now?"

Harriet folded her arms, trying to change the subject so that I couldn't dig any deeper.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, are you going to let this slide? Aren't you going to make a fuss like you usually do?"

Ah.

People held certain expectations even towards troublemakers.

The guys who read the newspaper in the lobby earlier looked at me as if I was going to cause trouble again, but they actually pretty much looked forward to that.

With how things usually go, Reinhardt would always get at least one hit in; he wouldn't be able to sit still, right? He's going to turn everything upside down again.

Will he give it to them?

He's going to give it to them, right?

I could clearly read that this was what they were thinking. Harriet must have also thought that I was the type of person that wouldn't be able to let this go.

Just what was with this?

What people wanted to see was me acting aggressive towards those arrogant people because that was "just how I was"?

Should I really do it?

Still, although I really wanted to beat them up while they twisted a lot of things and wrote that article with malicious intentions, some of the things they wrote were partially true.

"All the seniors will think that you're that kind of person, so are you just going to sit still?"

“…Some things are partially true."

Harriet turned her head at my words. She looked really surprised.

"Y-you… You really, erm, only think of doing pervy things to women… Is that so?"

"No, not that part!"

Harriet suddenly became scared and covered her chest with both of her arms.

No! Do you think you'd have to hide those two insect bites of yours?

"That's right… You're only close to women… The boys don't even talk to you, except Bertus…”

She seemed to think that I just admitted that another part of that article was partially true, not the one I meant. In fact, everything Harriet said was true except for the part where I only think about doing pervy things to girls, so I couldn't really retort.

"Come to think of it, even the female seniors…”

Low life.

That was how Harriet was looking at me.

"That's not it, okay? I didn't intend for that to happen!"

"T-then who do you like? Do you have someone you like or something?"

If I said "It's you" at that point, I could predict that her face would explode into red again, but if I did that, I probably wouldn't be able to handle the aftermath. That could leave permanent scars on her mind, after all.

"I don't really have anyone like that…"

Put differently, I liked all the girls I was close with; I didn't like them as members of the opposite sex, though, because of reasons!

"…So, you want to be close with everyone, is that it?"

"Why are you saying that?"

"My brothers say that guys like you are the worst in the world."

Why did she bring her personal grudges into it? And why did she even talk with her brothers about me?

B-but what she said was true…

Someone like that was nothing but utter trash…

It seemed that the impression that I was a playboy that didn't really like anyone but flirted with everyone was about to solidify in Harriet's mind.

Damnit.

Why did that shit happen just because of some fucking newspaper?

"Haaaa…"

I really didn't want to worry about those small things, after all. I didn't even know

what I could do about what my seniors already did.

The Prince of the Demon Realm, Valier, might be able to endure it and be patient…

"I'm going to fuck them up good."

But the gangster, Reinhardt, couldn't stand that shit!

CHAPTER 121

I didn't really know what to do, so I just recklessly went up to the seventh floor and knocked on the ‘Monthly Royal Class' clubroom door.

-Bang, bang!

If they weren't in, I planned on going to every class to look for them, but the door opened up. The clubroom was definitely smaller than Grace's, but it was still pretty large because this was Royal Class, after all.

There were three people sitting at a table that looked like a conference table. The one who opened the door was a man that looked like a senior.

"You're… Reinhardt?"

"Ah, yes."

I was planning to at least shout something like, "What the hell do you bastards think you're doing?!"

However, the people who seemed to be that club's members had gloomy expressions on their faces, and there was, of course, one more person that definitely wasn't part of this club.

“…Reinhardt."

Charlotte, with her chin resting on her right hand, sat at the table—looking at me as if I was pathetic.

"Sigh… You really came in person, huh?"

Charlotte shook her head in disbelief as if she was actually disappointed.

* * *

All the seniors sitting opposite Charlotte kept their mouths tightly shut. They were

surrounded by a rather solemn atmosphere. What? Why was she here?

"Why are you here?"

“…I was sure you'd come over here to fight, so I came here in advance to stop you before you end up destroying everything."

"Ah."

Charlotte expected how I would act. But I tried to hold back first, you know? I only became so angry because Harriet kept on egging me on, you know?

…Anyway, I ended up going there, so Charlotte read me correctly, I guess.

She went there in advance, expecting that I would cause a scene. Still, it was pretty creepy that she ended up reading me so accurately.

Although the other guys were our seniors, they were all frozen solid—probably because the Imperial Princess ended up coming to their club room. Charlotte smiled subtly as she looked at the monthly newspaper that got published that day lying on the table.

"Of course, I also came here because I noticed that the article differed greatly from what I said in the interview."

I felt all the seniors flinch at those words. In front of Charlotte, who was a lot higher in status than them, they were like mice before a cat. By the way, that club only had three members? The Royal Class had so few students, so that might not be too surprising, actually.

Charlotte smiled and looked into their eyes one by one.

"Seniors, I definitely said something to the effect of Reinhardt being a good person in the interview. So how did the content end up like this?"

Charlotte was scary when she was angry, but her smiling like that was scary in its own way. It was creepy in a different sense than Bertus's.

One of them opened their mouths in response to Charlotte's interrogation-styled question.

"Tha-that's… When I compiled the answers of all the interviews of the first years, it seemed like there were a lot of them scared of Reinhardt and… We wanted to focus on the unspoken."

"Ah, so because of that gap you felt, you wrote a speculative article telling others that Reinhardt might bully his classmates and those other things?"

"It wasn't just mere speculation; we judged most of those things to be kind of true…"

They seemed to switch between polite and informal speech a lot, and the one who spoke just then felt extremely polite but still talked informally.

"You're saying that you chose uncertain facts that you gleaned from unspoken words over the certain content of the interviews? You just picked out some uncertain circumstantial information and built the article around—"

"Tha-that's not it!"

The president cut off Charlotte's words while she was still talking, but she kept on smiling.

"Anyway, you completely ignored when I said in my interview that Reinhardt is a sincere and good person, didn't you?"

The problem isn't that you insulted Reinhardt but that you ignored the statement of the Imperial Princess, you know?

That was what she meant.

Scary.

She was sometimes scarier than Bertus!

* * *

"That… That's… That's…"

"Of course, it is true that Reinhardt is only close to the female students. In fact, because he caused one problem after the other at the beginning of the semester, his image as a problem child became ingrained in everyone's mind."

Why are you doing this all of a sudden?! If you want to insult me, at least look at me! This feels like you're talking to someone else, so it hurts even more!

"But since then, he hasn't caused a single problem, and I don't think Reinhardt is actually a lecherous person. He only maintains healthy friendships with the people he's close with."

Is this the carrot after the stick?

Anyway, Charlotte expected that I would come over and flip the place upside down myself. She was worried about me, after all, so she took action first to meet me there.

I was grateful, although I felt a little complicated, as it still seemed like Charlotte saw me as a crazy bastard.

"I think it is very bad practice to harm individual students by releasing such uncertain information."

They did publish some insults about me, and, no matter if they were a student club or not, they still published a monthly newspaper. It seemed unacceptable to Charlotte for them to report based on implications rather than facts under the guise of journalism.

The seniors listened to her, looking even more nervous than when confronted with a teacher's scolding.

"I don't know why you wrote such an article about Reinhardt; however, there's no law that forbids you from doing as such… Unless you've done similar things before."

Charlotte looked towards the president and blinked.

"Did you keep your old publications? I want to take a look at them."

"Uh, ah… Yes…"

Looking at the situation, it became clear that the Prince and Princess seemed to abide by Temple's rules and yet not at all.

In Temple, there was a hierarchy between seniors and juniors, but the Princess, whose status was excessively high, ordered that fourth-year around with no

hesitation at all, although it was only a nominal request.

The president handed Charlotte the previous editions of "Monthly Royal Class", which they kept in the club room. Charlotte asked me to sit next to her, requesting that we look through them together.

So there I was, sifting through those previous publications together with Charlotte. It seemed like she wanted to see if they slandered anyone else by spreading malicious rumors without any proper basis like they did with me.

If Charlotte determined that the club crossed the line multiple times, would she get rid of it somehow?

-Flip… Flip…

"Hmm… This is a monthly paper that's only available inside the Royal Class, right?"

"Oh, yes. That's right…"

"Do a lot of people read it?"

Charlotte didn't stop asking questions while reading through the articles.

"Well… To be honest, hardly anyone ever reads it… But there are still some people who read it when a new issue is published—"

"Well, actually, even if they look through it, they tend to prefer reading the weekly Temple Times, not ours."

While the president murmured, another senior interrupted him.

Those guys were accurately evaluating the value of their publications. The president glared at the other senior, who had suddenly intervened as if he was talking nonsense. They still seemed to have some pride in what they did.

"So… This is a newspaper one wouldn't read unless one was curious about Royal Class' internal news. It's also a monthly newspaper, and even the people that are interested in it prefer to read the weekly newspaper published by a larger club called Temple Times instead of this internal publication, is that right?

"T-they certainly have a lot more members than us… So we can't even compete with their level of writing and amount of information."

It was a monthly newspaper, but barely anyone read it. In fact, if people wanted to get some information, they'd rather read the weekly newspaper made by a much larger number of people than the monthly newspaper made by only three—that much was obvious.

It couldn't even be called a third-rate tabloid. No one read it in the first place, so why the hell did they publish something about me in there? They wanted to get people reading. The first-years knew they were going to cover me, so all of them read their newspaper, and those seniors that were curious about me or disliked me were likely to read it as well.

Charlotte sighed.

"I'm rather glad about that. All your content is weird speculative reports, dripping in conspiracy theories and circumstantial evidence… If people actually ended up believing this stuff, it would cause a lot of trouble…"

Charlotte continued to talk while reading the articles, then she suddenly stopped her breath.

She was reading last month's, May's, publication.

The attack on the Imperial Capital, why did it happen?

The attack on the Imperial Capital, presumed to be the work of demons, caused great chaos in the Capital as well as the whole Empire. This incident is presumed to be the work of remnants of the Demon Realm, and although it had been announced that they are currently being pursued, there have been no clues or news of them catching the perpetrators up until now, about a month after the incident. However, we didn't even consider very fundamental questions that we should have. This time, apart from the identity and purpose of the perpetrators, we would like to consider some questions the authorities did not present.

The incident took place at night, taking advantage of the dark hours when all citizens of the Imperial Capital were deep asleep. We have a brief overview of events. They seemed to have clashed with the Knights Templar in front of their headquarters and escaped by seizing the Warp Gate located there. But, just why were the main forces of

the Knights Templar outside that night? The Knights Templar did not give their statement about this. They didn't mention anything else other than claiming that they had been attacked. So it's only natural to wonder just why the most elite unit of the Knights Templar wander around outside of their headquarters late at night. This question needs an answer.

Therefore, after pondering deeply about this matter, one might come to the conclusion that there has to be a different reason behind the demons' attack on the Knights Templar.

Charlotte fell silent after looking at the article.

Why did the most elite members of the Knights Templar wander around outside, fully dressed in armor at night? Weren't they actually on some kind of secret mission for which they had to go around like that at night?

Why were there no casualties when such a large-scale attack took place, and why did they just run off through a warp gate? If it was an attack, wouldn't they have chosen a different place? What would they gain by attacking those elite troops?

The article pointed out various suspicious things and said that there was something else going on behind the scenes we didn't know about.

They were convinced that there was more to this, although they didn't base this on facts but mere suspicions, and their tone was so confident that it was pretty much an insult towards the Empire.

With a firm look in her eyes, Charlotte looked at each of the club members.

“…These people will end up creating a lot of trouble. Really."

‘Did you guys go fucking crazy, or do you actually want to die?', That was what she tried to signal to them.

Of course, Charlotte was furious.

"No, it's a relief that no one has read nor cared for this newspaper so far. Do you think you can say whatever you want just because you're Temple students? This is both an insult towards the Knights Templar and the Imperial Family! Thank the Gods that no one has ever cared enough for your nonsensical speculative articles!"

Charlotte was very furious and shouted wildly at her seniors.

But I couldn't help but know the real reason behind her anger. The article drew quite a few conclusions that came very close to the Imperial Family's as well as Knights Templar's hidden side. I mean, all of it was very suspicious to begin with.

However, Charlotte got so angry because she knew that if other people carefully read this article without a filter, their lives would be in danger.

It was as if they were asking to be dragged to the streets to get killed.

Everyone was trembling at the Princess' extreme anger; I was no different.

I was hella scared!

Charlotte didn't stop shouting as she looked over the other publications beside that one.

"These are all just rumors and misinformed speculations! ‘Are there believers of the Demon Gods’ Church in Temple?', ‘Are there any Revolutionary Forces in Temple?', ‘Are there members of the Magic Society inside of Temple?', seriously… Do you just write whatever comes to mind?! This isn't even worth writing about. ‘Are there ghosts in Temple?' Why are you writing articles like that?!"

There was also a problem occurring on my side.

[Quest appeared – Revolutionary Forces]

[Description: There are rumors that there are Revolutionary Forces hiding inside Temple.]

[Goal: Uncover the truth behind the rumors.]

[Reward: 300 achievement points]

[Quest appeared – Magic Society]

[Description: There are rumors that members of the Magic Society have infiltrated the Temple.]

[Goal : Uncover the truth behind the rumors.]

[Reward: 300 achievement points]

[Quest appeared – The Phantom of Temple]

[Description: There are rumors that ghosts are haunting Temple.]

[Goal : Uncover the truth behind these rumors.]

[Reward: 300 achievement points]

Three quests emerged instantly. What? Was that place like a quest vending machine?

"And what is this? Great. I don't know if you thought this was a big concession not by saying that they are in the Empire, but by stating that there are demon spies in Temple? Really…? Temple has its own barrier that repels demons. How do you think demons could get in here like that?"

[Quest appeared – Temple's Demons]

[Description: There are rumors that demon spies have infiltrated Temple… Oh, that's you!]

[Goal: lol… sorry…! LOL…!!]

[Reward : ??]

[‘Quest – Temple's Demons' has been deleted.]

That crazy fucker again.

Charlotte shook her head and turned her eyes towards those three as if she couldn't leave them alone.

…What Demon spies?

Was everything those idiots wrote unexpectedly correct? Charlotte burst into laughter as she rummaged through other editions, wondering if they could get even more absurd.

"Just what is this—"

"Ch-charlotte. Stop, let's take a break."

Otherwise, I was going to be swamped in quests!

CHAPTER 122

Charlotte left the club after half-coercing them to gather all their publications and correct them immediately. It seemed that she didn't want to deal with them anymore.

I was in the first-year dormitory drinking tea with her.

"They are so outrageously stupid…"

Charlotte sipped her black tea and then just shook her head as if she thought of those crazy members of 'Monthly Royal Class' who only published crazy stories and stupid rumors as articles as nothing but outrageous fools.

"No matter how I look at it, there definitely wasn't a teacher in charge of this. There's no way that those articles would have been approved otherwise."

"That's right."

If there was a teacher in charge of that club, Charlotte was convinced that such ridiculous articles wouldn't have seen the light of day.

In fact, they exclusively published weird rumors to the point of absurdity.

"I'll have to do whatever I can to close down that place."

Charlotte seemed highly determined to dismantle that club of idiots.

However, I thought a bit differently about the matter.

"Hmm… Do you really have to do that?"

Rumors were just rumors, after all; also, every single one of them turned into a quest. I would receive achievement points just by checking if they were true or not.

There was nothing bad about having them around. They could compile all those rumors on my behalf or something. That time, the situation was a bit different, but

there was no disadvantage to keeping them around in the long run.

"…You're in the position of a victim here, Reinhardt."

Charlotte probably wondered why she should leave that club alone.

"No one even reads their newspaper. Rather, no one even views it as Royal Class' official internal newspaper, so shouldn't we just give them a warning that they shouldn't write about sensitive topics any more?"

Honestly, they only raised some suspicions but didn't actually know the truth, so after they got scolded by Charlotte like that, they'd probably think twice before writing such articles again. They had looked like they never thought about what consequences their actions might have.

"Hrm…"

"Think about it, if you leave those idiots together, they'll only do one stupid thing; if you split them up, they will do three."

It was probably better if we gathered those idiots in one place, and since they were given a severe scolding, they wouldn't do anything crazy like writing something that could harm someone or question larger organizations. They had gotten burned for it, after all.

Charlotte seemed to agonize over this for a long time, but eventually, she sighed heavily with her brows slightly furrowed.

"Fine, it's funny enough that you, the victim, are telling me this. Should I not have come forward?"

"No, I'm really grateful that you came. If you didn't, things probably wouldn't have ended that well."

I was really grateful that Charlotte came to mediate. If I had gone alone, I might have gotten in trouble with some seniors again.

"Yeah, it won't be too late to decide on this after we take a look at their next edition. No one even reads this newspaper, to begin with."

It seemed like Charlotte would really raze the club to the ground if their next edition was the same as the other ones.

In the end, I was able to gather four quests—all of them came from those rumors.

The Demon God's Church, Revolutionary Forces, Ghosts, and the Magic Society.

All of them could be true, or they could be just rumors. However, if they were just rumors, then I had nothing to lose.

Achievement points were even more valuable than money. The more I had, the better.

Just finding a place from where quests would pour out of was already a big boon for me. Charlotte rested her chin on her hand as she sipped on her tea.

"Still, some of these rumors might be worth looking into."

"looking into?"

"I didn't get swayed by those ridiculous speculative articles. Keep that in mind."

Charlotte looked at me sternly as she spoke.

"The Demon God's Church and the Revolutionary Forces."

I obtained some information about the Demon God's Church rumors not only from the Monthly Royal Class but also from Grace. According to the Student council president, there was nothing to worry about.

"After the incident last time, there have been rumors about the emergence of the Demon God's Church making its rounds. It wouldn't be surprising if there were some believers in Temple, where people from all over the Empire gather."

Charlotte wasn't certain, but she seemed to think that the possibility of there being believers of the Demon God's Church in Temple was quite high.

"And the Revolutionary Forces… It's only natural for people to have strange thoughts when their heads grow bigger, and this place certainly makes people's heads grow overly big, doesn't it?"

Thinking back, Charlotte was very cold-hearted towards me as well at first. So I knew that she had no hesitation piercing people with harsh words like a master. Both Bertus and she let their masks fall when they stood before me.

Both of them showed their true faces to me. Was that a good thing?

Anyway, Temple was a place of learning and a place that nurtured people, after all. So, eventually, some might get big heads, leading to them having strange thoughts.

“It would be stranger if these so-called Republicans weren’t in Temple.”

There might be some believers of the Demon God’s Church in Temple.

However, it would be strange if there weren’t any Revolutionary Forces in it.

That was how Charlotte judged the situation. She looked at me and smiled.

“How about it, Reinhardt? Do you want to investigate them together with me?”

“…Me?”

“Yeah. I heard that you like the Empire quite a bit, isn’t that right, Reinhardt? The Demon Church and the Republicans are both enemies of the Empire, aren’t they?”

That was what I told Bertus, that I liked the Empire.

Actually, things seemed good and all, but I was originally from a world ruled by democracy. Then shouldn’t I be on the side of the Revolutionary Forces if I followed those typical developments? Wasn’t it my job to bring democracy to this world or something?

However, how did I suddenly end up becoming an imperial loyalist?

“This time, you won’t have to be careful of Bertus, so you shouldn’t have anything to worry about.”

Who would have thought that I would end up as the Empire’s forerunner in suppressing democracy and republicanism. I heard that I wouldn’t have to worry about the Demon God’s Church, but if we actually found these ‘Republicans’, they’d get 100% beheaded, wouldn’t they?

I mean, I was neither a democrat nor a republican, to begin with. I was the enemy of mankind, the Prince of the Demon Realm, you know?

So wasn't this a 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' kind of deal?

With that in mind, shouldn't I actually push those forces into action to cause chaos in the Empire?

It was supposed to be like that, wasn't it? I felt like I was about to lose my mind for a second.

* * *

It was the weekend. Charlotte told me to look for those Demon God believers and the Republicans, but that was for later.

She handed me a letter after saying she had something to do within the Imperial Family that day—it was a letter for Valier.

'I'd like you to deliver this letter today, but you also have your own plans, don't you? Thank you and sorry for bothering you all the time, Reinhardt.'

'Oh, this is nothing much.'

Charlotte hurriedly left Temple, apparently because she had some business to take care of, but she had seen my newspaper article and put it off. Had I become close enough with her that the Princess would spend her precious time on me? Of course, she'd care a bit about me because I had the role of a carrier pigeon.

There was no real reason for me to deliver the letter either. Since Valier was me, I didn't have to bring the letter anywhere else. However, I couldn't let anyone see me just nonchalantly writing a reply to it there, so I went out of Temple.

I didn't use detours or a disguise. Since I already made contact with Eleris as Reinhardt, there wouldn't be any problems from Charlotte's side, at least. Rather, it would probably be more dangerous if I disguised myself, used some detours, and went to Eleris as a different person because it might look like Reinhardt gave the letter to someone else entirely.

Bertus's people might follow me, but it seemed that he had other things to focus on

than the kid Charlotte was looking for.

So I was able to go to Eleris' store more comfortably than before.

"You're here, Your Highness."

Eleris greeted me with the same smile as always.

* * *

It had been a while since my last visit, so I told her everything I did up to then. When I showed up, Eleris locked the store. Of course, no one would actually go in there even if she didn't close it up.

"…A deserted island, you say?"

"Yeah."

"Isn't that too much? No, how could they leave 17-year-old children on some island to fend for themselves, even *if* they were talented?"

Eleris didn't seem to comprehend why we had to go through something so absurd as a group mission.

"The mental capacity of those in charge of Temple who planned this mission is seriously lacking. What nonsense…"

I-I'm sorry…

I had actually been the one to plan it… I shouldn't have watched Law of the Jungle back then.

Eleris continued to complain about the ones in charge of Temple who planned such nonsensical missions, and she seriously started worrying about me after I went through something so difficult.

Of course, that only made me feel even more ashamed because those things were basically my fault.

"There were orcs? Two of them? Don't those guys underestimate orcs too much? A

heavily armed orc could easily crush ten well-trained human soldiers. Even if they were summons, what are they making kids deal with? No matter if they managed to finish the mission or not, mentally weaker children might experience some serious trauma that would scar them for life… I'm sure that the person who planned that mission never experienced actual combat before!"

…That's right. Okay! It's my fault! I already know that! I realized too late that all of this was problematic. How should I have known that they would have to face them for real one day!

"By the way, it's amazing that you managed to hunt them."

"I didn't do anything, though."

"But it's already amazing enough that you managed to survive in that environment, your Highness."

Eleris was smiling at me as if she was proud of me after completing that harsh and absurd mission. Just what on earth was that happy yet painful feeling I felt after getting sworn at before getting praised?

"Did you come here just because of the letter?"

"It's been a while since I last came around, so I wanted to see your face. Are you doing okay?"

"Yes, I noticed that all the people that were snooping around the area are gone now. I think you can lower your guard a bit when you come here."

Charlotte achieved her goal, and Bertus eventually gave up the chase. So, Eleris' store seemed to be rather safe; I was to read and write those letters in peace.

"How about Airi?"

Airi, the successor to the Succubus Queen. Her ambition was to earn a lot of money in the southern island nations and topple the Empire's power that way. I heard that her business was doing well.

"Things aren't going that smoothly yet, but that's not a matter of concern."

"…How long has it been since she started doing this?"

I couldn't pay attention to everything they did, but it should have only been a few months. Eleris scratched her cheeks and showed me an ambiguous smile.

"Uhmm… Well… I think they are focusing more on connections with people rather than earning money."

"…What do you mean?"

"Ehem! Well… They want to win over influential people… Yes."

What did she mean with 'win over'?

Weren't they running a bar? Could the word 'winning over' really be used in this context? Weren't they actually seducing them? She censored herself, didn't she?

"Captains, loan sharks, and major officials… They run their business… by embracing such people."

Airi and company settled in Rajak, the Capital and largest trading port of the Edina Archipelago. It seemed that those types of people became their regulars.

Airi decided that creating connections to such economic giants would help her more in growing rapidly than earning some small change.

What was with that? I sent her there to keep her busy, but it seemed like their scale was growing bigger and bigger. I mean, the end justifies the means, so it should be fine even if the method was bizarre, but wasn't that just too crazy?

"…So, they are borrowing money from those loan sharks at a low rate and getting permission for their actions from these major officials. I don't really know yet what they are going to do with those captains, but they are winning all those people over by flirting with them, right?"

"Yes… I think so."

Even if their eyes were rotten, it would still be a piece of cake for a succubus to seduce people of such caliber, with or without our abilities. Magic? Do we need something like that just to seduce these types of people?

That was probably how they thought.

Anyway, it seemed like everything was going well on Airi's side.

"But still, tell them to be careful. Things could turn for the worse in an instant."

"Yes, I'll pass it on to them."

The pink-haired succubus queen was steadily realizing her dream of becoming a businesswoman, so I didn't know what direction this world would take.

I opened Charlotte's letter—its contents were on the calmer side. Her first letter contained her sentiments of guilt, that she wanted to see me and that she was sorry; this letter didn't hold anything like that.

They were things like: *How are you doing, I wonder. This happened to me last time. These days, those kinds of things have been going on, and I think this and that.*

[By the way, the friend who delivered this letter is called Reinhardt, and although his personality is a bit rough, he's still a gentleman, so he won't open and read these letters before delivering them, right? I shouldn't worry like this. He isn't that kind of person.]

…I felt my conscience getting pricked. No, but if I didn't read them, I wouldn't be able to write a reply. It couldn't be helped.

[We had group missions in Temple recently. All members of our classes were gathered together to do certain tasks. It would have been great if you also came with us. It was hard, but in the end, it was a fun experience. There were times when I wondered if we were able to get through this safely, and at times I thought we were doing really well, but then people started to collapse in that situation. It was hard, but I understand why they make us do these missions. To be honest, I thought I'd be able to do well because of what I went through, but that wasn't necessarily the truth.]

[I regretfully had to depend on that power at the end. I didn't want to depend on it. In the end, even in the face of a completely artificial crisis, I had to use that power, so I feel a little disappointed in myself.]

At the end of the letter, she briefly mentioned her supernatural power. Charlotte seemed to greatly dislike depending on her power.

[Take care, I don't know when I'll be able to see your face again. I hope that day will come soon.]

I wrote a reply filled with lies to Charlotte's letter again. I was curious if she would answer if I asked her about her supernatural powers like that, but I didn't actually put that question in there. I didn't want to force her to reveal what she was trying to hide so desperately.

Rather, now that I think about it, if I have to act like I don't know about those things anyway, it would certainly be better if I really didn't know.

I wrote down some acknowledgments to Charlotte's recount of her daily life and told her about my fabricated daily life.

Lies beget lies.

Wrongs beget wrongs.

I didn't believe that I could keep up those lies forever.

Until when would I have to lie like that?

I didn't only lie to Charlotte.

I knew that everything would fall apart as soon as the truth came to light. All the relationships I built in Temple would get completely destroyed the moment my secret was revealed. That was bound to happen.

"Haaaa…"

After writing for a long time, I put down my pen and rubbed away the tears that came from my eyes. Eleris just quietly hugged me.

Your Highness…"

As if she knew why I was suffering, Eleris just quietly held me.

It was impossible, both for Charlotte and me.

CHAPTER 123

I stayed at Eleris's store for a while longer, even after I finished writing the letter.

"Eleris, do you know about the Demon Gods' Church?"

I wrote a scene in which remnants of the Demon Gods' Church appeared, but I never specified what the Demon Gods' Church was in detail. I just popped in some incident about the remnants trying to do something but ending up clashing with Ludwig—who was traveling around for his vacation at that time—and getting completely destroyed.

So I didn't actually know much about them as I didn't properly set up their organization.

At my question, Eleris tilted her head slightly as she looked at me.

"Why are you curious about the Demon Gods' Church so suddenly?"

Her attitude of asking why I was suddenly so curious about something like that showed that she seemed worried that I thought about building my power by using the Demon Gods' Church.

"No, it seems like the Demon Gods' Church is rising again because of what we did or something like that."

"Aah, is that so?"

Eleris placed her hand on her chin and revealed a subtle smile.

"Your Highness, there is no such thing as a demon god."

Huh?

There wasn't?

"…It doesn't exist? Not at all?"

“Yes, Your Highness.”

Did those gods turn into a non-existent concept because I didn’t set it up properly? So, did that mean that the believers of the Demon gods’ Church believed in gods that didn’t even exist?

However, when I described the clash with the remnants of the Demon Gods’ Church, I clearly wrote that they used divine powers. How could they use divine power if the god they believed in didn’t even exist?

This bordered on cognitive dissonance.

Eleris began to explain further while still wearing that subtle smile.

“There were some religions in the Demon Realm, although there were only a few believers, so there were also priests. In other words, the religion the demons in the Demon Realm believed in ended up being called the Demon Gods’ Church by the humans.”

What? So the demons had religion as well, but if demon gods didn’t exist, did that mean that the demons believed in non-existent gods?

“…But you said that demon gods don’t exist? So do the demons believe in gods that don’t exist, then?”

“No, that’s not it.”

Eleris shook her head.

“There are two gods the demons believe in that are actually quite well-known by the humans—Suiran, the God of Slaughter, and Nox, the God of Darkness. Other than those two, there is the God of Corruption, Kier, and the God of Conflagration, Tallard. There’s also the God of Hatred, Egrsian, but he isn’t that well known.”

Although I had learned about the Five Major Churches in my divine studies class, they didn’t tell us about the existence of the gods the demons believed in. Therefore, that was the first time that I heard those names.

“So what do you mean by there not being any demon gods?”

“They are getting misrepresented.”

Misrepresentation.

What did she mean by that?

“There are Five Major Churches represented by five gods. The God of War, Als, The God of the Sun, Salaam, The God of the Moon, Mensis, The God of Purity, Towan, and the God of Courage, Ritter. These are the five, right?”

“…Huh. Yeah.”

“Slaughter and War, the Moon and Darkness. The Sun and Fire, Hatred and Courage, aren’t these concepts rather similar? Of course, Corruption and Purity are opposing concepts.”

The God of Slaughter and the God of War.

The God of Darkness and the God of the Moon.

The God of Conflagration and the God of the Sun.

The God of Hatred and the God of Courage.

The God of Corruption and the God of Purity.

They were either the opposites or had a similar feeling to them.

Didn’t they actually correlate?

Eleris looked at me and smiled.

“The humans didn’t want to admit the demons believed in the same five major religions they believed in, so they started by changing the gods’ names. They serve the god, Als, but that Als is actually Suiran, the God of Slaughter. The Mensis they believe in is actually Nox, the God of Darkness. And in the case of Towan, they turned their concept completely upside down.”

Some humans who found out the demons’ faiths did not want to admit that they actually believed in the same gods as themselves; therefore, they changed their gods’

names as they wished.

“And after the communication between the two Realms was cut off, they began to change the belief system of the demons and called it whatever they wanted. As a result, this became the truth to the humans. There were even some humans who started believing in that false faith. These are the believers of the Demon Gods’ Church.”

The Demon Gods’ Church had nothing to do with the demons’ actual faith. Among the demons, those who had faith actually believed in the Five Major Churches and didn’t even know what a demon god was supposed to be.

Humans didn’t want to admit that they worshiped the same gods as the demons, so they wanted to make their gods distinctly different from the demons’. Therefore, they created that artificial existence, the demon gods.

Like that, they were able to call the demons’ gods evil ones and their own gods true gods. However, there were some people who started following the false demon gods after seeing that fabricated truth. They would form the Demon Gods’ Church.

“…So, the Demon Gods’ Church is actually unique to humans.”

“That’s right, Your Highness. We actually believe in the same gods.”

There were no demon gods.

Those who believed in Als, the God of War, and those who believed in Suiran, the God of Slaughter, ultimately believed in the same entity. Nox and Mensis were no different, either.

“So the reason people who believe in the demon gods can use divine power is because they ultimately still believe in Nox or Mensis, Suiran or Als, and so on. They received their divine powers from the other gods using the demon gods as a type of proxy.”

“Yes, you’re right. However, the nature of this power changes depending on how it’s used.”

So, in the end, even if they used the same divine power, if they used it for wicked causes, it would turn into an evil power. Even if they served the same being, the way

they manifested their divine power could be completely different.

The divine power of the Demon Gods' Church and its priests expressed themselves like that.

"Then there's actually no reason to oppress the Demon God's Church, right?"

"Basically, since they actually worship the same gods, but do you really think that will happen?"

Eleris tilted her head, wearing a vague expression.

"The humans will never admit that the demon gods they created were actually the same entities as their Gods. So no, that probably won't happen."

If one were to slander or deny the demon gods, that would actually mean that they insulted their own gods. Humans, especially priests and paladins, would never admit to this truth.

"Also, most of that Church's believers gained strength by praying to an entity disguised as a demon god for no virtuous reasons. There is no guarantee that they aren't dangerous."

No one would join the Demon Gods' Church with good intentions in mind. In fact, they would turn into very dangerous people after they actually gained power—they would be willing to use whatever underhanded and evil method there was.

"Therefore, while the demon gods as such don't exist, they might as well, with how things are."

They weren't real, but they might as well be.

The demon god were concepts created by humans, but it still affected the real world. So even if it was the Five Major Gods disguised under the title of demon gods, it wasn't actually that much different from them actually existing.

"Even if their doctrines were well-intentioned, that didn't necessarily mean that holding faith in them was a good thing."

Eleris smiled.

Their laws might be good, but faith in those laws wasn't necessarily good.

Eleris' words were deeply engraved into my heart.

Eventually, the illusions called the demon gods led to the creation of the very real Demon Gods' Church.

"It's complicated."

"Yes, it's a rather complicated matter."

In the end, the humans' desire to separate themselves from the demons gave rise to the demon gods that didn't exist beforehand, and because of that, the Demon Gods' Church—which served these gods for impure reasons—emerged.

This was actually all the humans' doing, but they ended up falling on their noses. If the believers of the Demon Gods' Church actually happened upon demons and they told them what they actually believed in, those believers would probably react as such: 'What are these bastards talking about? Who the hell are Nox and Suiran?'

In the first place, if the gods actually cared how their divine powers got used, the believers of the Demon Gods' Church wouldn't even be able to use these powers. However, they didn't care—just as Olivia had concluded in her desperation.

The Five Gods lent their power to whoever believed in them, but they didn't care what they used them for; that was why corrupt priests and this organization called the Demon Gods' Church could exist.

"They are gods, and yet they just randomly give out their power to whoever believes in them. Isn't that too irresponsible?

"What do you want to do about it? They probably were created to be that way, to begin with."

After all, the holes created by my complacency got filled like that. It explained why corrupt priests could still use their divine powers and how the Demon Gods' Religion could exist even if I hadn't properly set up those demon gods. There were also parts in the original where those corrupt priests made their appearance as well, not only the believers of the Demon Gods' Church.

How could corrupt priests use divine powers?

=The Gods don't really care about humans or what they do.

What is the Demon Gods' Church? Why aren't you explaining their belief system clearly?

=Actually, they believe in the same gods, yep.

In the end, that shitty situation got created because of my irresponsible story writing.

Hence…

The person to blame for all of it was me.

Everything I did actually came back to bite me.

It was all my fault.

It was a really big mistake.

* * *

I had just casually asked about the Demon Gods' Church and actually found out the rather shocking truth. The artificial creation of the demon gods because of the humans' misrepresentation of the demons' religions. Although there were only a few among the demons that followed a religion, they actually also believed in the five major gods.

That misunderstanding had grown deeper to the point where no human actually knew the truth anymore. And if someone claimed such things, then not only the Knights Templar but society as a whole would want that person dead. Accepting something like that as the truth was the same as denying their entire religious history.

Humans would never admit that they had the same belief system as the demons.

So, in conclusion, I ended up agreeing with Eleris that while there is no such thing as a demon god, they still existed. The Demon Gods' Church was already a very

dangerous force, after all.

If the believers of the Demon Gods' Church, who wished for the world to fall apart, believed in the Gods in such a twisted way, they absolutely had to be prevented from achieving what they wanted to do.

I handed the letter from Valier over to Charlotte, who returned to Temple around Sunday evening.

"…Have you seen him in person?"

Charlotte seemed to be wondering if I actually met Valier.

"No. I only got this reply from that person."

"I see… Yes, thank you, Reinhardt."

Charlotte returned to her dormitory with the letter cradled in her arms as if it was the world's most precious treasure.

I felt like I had a thorn stuck in my heart. It seemed like I hadn't grown numb yet.

It sure stung.

* * *

I didn't really know where to start with Charlotte, who wanted to search for the rumored believers of the Demon Gods' Church and members of the Revolutionary Forces inside Temple. I decided to wait for Charlotte to approach me first.

It was already June.

It was definitely summer by then.

Which meant the development that would fit certain peoples' delusions happened.

Monday. When it was time for our common classes…

"As the weather is getting hotter, we will replace your P.E. classes with swimming lessons from today onwards."

According to my personal opinion that swimming lessons were indispensable in the summer for a novel of the school life genre, Mr. Epinhauser announced that all P.E. classes would be replaced with swimming lessons from that day on.

“Oooooh!”

The one most excited about the development was Kono Lint. The reason for his exhilaration was rather obvious, so that earned him some glares from the girls, ending in the guy just awkwardly scratching the back of his head. It seemed like that guy couldn’t be helped but get disliked by the girls.

-Swimming classes would be easier, wouldn’t they?

-Is that so?

-… I can’t swim.

Of course, the female students of Class A seemed rather satisfied with the fact that the hellish physical training got changed into swimming class. All except Ellen, who had a combat talent.

Well.

Wasn’t swimming actually the most exhausting out of any other exercise?

We wouldn’t just play around in the pool; it was still training, you know?

* * *

We had P.E. after lunch.

After everyone changed into their swimsuits, we gathered at the outdoor swimming pool. P.E. classes were jointly attended by both members of Class A and B, so there were 22 first-year students gathered there.

Anyway, I had heard they used gathered rainwater as water for the swimming pool, so did they gather it little by little up to then and use up everything in one go? There wouldn’t be any problem with the quality of the water because they regularly used purification magic on it, or so I had heard.

It seemed like they cleaned and reorganized the whole poolside before swimming classes started. They removed the sunbeds, but there were some shade-throwing umbrellas.

Both the teachers and assistant teachers that were in charge of our P.E. classes wore swimsuits as well—they'd probably act as something like lifeguards from then on.

The boys' swim pants were of a square cut, and the girls' swimsuits were also just ordinary swimsuits; they were both navy blue in color. They were just simple swimsuits with a plain design; there was nothing special about them, and yet there were some among the male students who turned to look around unconsciously.

Among all of us, there was one who stood out the most.

"Miss Grantz, I believe you have heard that it's forbidden to wear your personal swimwear."

The P.E. teacher singled out Liana de Grantz, who stood out quite a bit—she was wearing a white tube-top bikini.

She was even the last to come out of the changing room.

It looked good on her, but she sure stood out by being the only one wearing something like that.

"…The one I was given was too small, and I couldn't wear it. So I brought my own one from the dormitory."

Ah, so that was why she took so long.

When they heard that the swimsuit was too small for her, both the male and female students started to stare at Grantz. Her lips trembled slightly, seeming a bit embarrassed.

Yeah. It probably was too small. That was plausible enough. Still, it was given to us at the start of the semester, but it was already too small for her…? Was she still growing that much?

The P.E. teacher was slightly flustered when he heard that her swimsuit was already too small for her.

"…That's, ehem. You should get a new swimsuit in a size that fits later. I'll allow it only this once."

"Yes."

Eventually, swimming classes started with Liana, who was the only one wearing a bikini.

CHAPTER 124

There were three outdoor pools, one with a depth of 1.3 meters, one with a depth of 2.5 meters, and one with a depth of 4 meters.

They were divided into beginner, intermediate, and advanced-level pools.

-M-my feet can't reach the floor!

-Calm down, don't be nervous.

-I-I'm scared! D-don't let go! Don't let go! D-dooooon't!

After checking if they were able to keep themselves afloat in the intermediate level pool, those that weren't able to float were sorted into the beginner's pool, those that could float were sorted into the intermediate pool, and those that could swim around in the intermediate pool were sorted into the 4-meter deep one.

So, the ones that got sorted into the beginner or intermediate pool learned basic swimming skills to survive. Basically, they learned how to keep themselves afloat and how to swim.

Each pool was pretty huge; it was spacious enough for 22 people to learn in them.

Harriet, Liana, and the other non-combat talents didn't get sorted into the advanced-level pool because most of them didn't know how to swim.

Of course, Ellen, who was more mermaid than human, got sorted into the advanced pool.

Including her, Bertus, Cliffman, and I, there were a total of four Class A members in there.

There were three Class B students there: Scarlett, Delphin Izadra, and Ludwig.

I learned how to swim quite some time ago, so I could still do it quite well.

“Now, we have confirmed that you guys know how to swim and have mastered basic swimming skills. Everyone is in good physical condition as well.”

Originally, Temple’s P.E. classes were rather tough, but I wrote the swimming class scenes with light novel developments in mind. Therefore, they only taught us for one hour out of the two-hour long swimming class. The other hour we were allowed to spend playing around.

Kids should be allowed to play around during swimming lessons! Don’t you think?

That was how I wrote it.

All we had to do was work for an hour.

In other words, I only described how they played around, not what kind of training they had to do. I only roughly wrote something like, “*They finished training and then played around~*”

So, I had not the slightest clue what kind of training we would have to go through.

“From this point on, you guys will do a 1500 meters race. I’ll be taking your time.”

‘…What?’

* * *

‘Playing’, my ass.

“Gasp… Gasp…”

After swimming those 1500 meters, I crawled out of the water and stretched out in the shade. It was impossible to finish swimming that distance without a break. I wasn’t a professional swimmer, either.

I finished it by taking some breaks in between.

“Reinhardt, you look exhausted.”

“…D-don’t talk to me…”

Ludwig still had a pretty good complexion, as if that was nothing.

Yeah, Ludwig was able to finish the lessons and still have the energy to play after. However, that was because he was someone with monstrous stamina completely different from a human! No matter what P.E. class he had to take, Ludwig could handle them with ease.

It might be because he was such a monster, but stamina wasn't the only problem.

Swimming required a lot of strength if one didn't know how to do it properly, but it was even more difficult because I had to compete with him.

I mean, I knew how to swim, but I wasn't a professional.

"Ellen was swimming really well, but she doesn't look tired at all."

"So…"

That was probably why she ranked first with an overwhelming margin. Ludwig was only second. His physical prowess was excellent, but Ellen was a much better swimmer. It didn't seem like it took her much effort, and yet she was so fast.

Scarlett placed third, Bertus placed fourth, I finished in fifth place, and Delphin in sixth place. Everyone, save Ellen and Ludwig, was just sitting around in a daze afterward.

It was already a miracle that I managed to complete the race. I even used my supernatural power.

"Huff… Huuff… Gasp… Huff… Gasp…"

-*Flop*

Delphin approached Ludwig and sat down next to him; her legs were shaking.

"Delphin, was it so hard?"

"D-do… Don't talk to me… Don't…"

Delphin said the same thing as me, then she froze up, seeming like a corpse, for a

while.

With that, 6th place had been decided, so the last place, the 7th place…

-Puhak! I-I got a cramp! Kuoohk!

“I’ll be there soon!”

Cliffman seemed to get a cramp because he tried to swim too forcefully.

We still had some time left, so the teacher made us swim another 1,500 meters. The results were pretty much the same except that Bertus and Scarlett switched rankings. Of course, our times were much slower as everyone was doing it for the second time.

“You guys should rest now. You can continue to swim if you want or rest beside the pool.”

The P.E. teacher gave us time to rest, telling us that we did everything we had to do for the day.

Sure enough…

“Uuurgh…”

“Did that guy even have the right to tell us to rest like that after he squeezed us out like a mop…?”

-*Splash!*

Except for Ellen—who dived into the depth of the 4-meter deep pool—and Ludwig, all of us felt sick and tired of water.

* * *

Originally, I had planned to investigate the Demon Gods’ Church and the Revolutionary Forces with Charlotte after P.E.

“R-Reinhardt… Let’s not do this today…”

“I get you.”

“Maybe tomorrow… No, I think tomorrow would be even worse… Anyway, sorry…”

“Go and take a rest.”

“Yes…”

After our classes were over, Charlotte, whose face seemed really exhausted, returned to her dormitory with Scarlett’s help.

Charlotte, who was sorted into the intermediate course because she did know how to swim a bit, lost all her stamina. It looked like it wasn’t just the advanced course that was extremely difficult.

Although we all were given a one-hour break, it was only the beginner course guys, who only practiced floating in the water, that played properly. The rest of us were almost completely exhausted.

Of course, Ludwig jumped into the beginner pool to play with the others.

All of the day’s plans had been canceled because Charlotte was too exhausted. The outdoor swimming pool could be used by anyone after class hours. Of course, one might come across the seniors as the pool was right in front of the class building where students of the Royal Class had their common classes.

Anyway, rather than there being swimming classes, it was more important that the swimming pool could be used at any time so pool events could occur. Ludwig would go there with his friends a lot.

As I had no other plans, I just went back to my usual schedule.

I’d usually do some physical training outside before dinner, and after dinner, I would do some swordsmanship training with Ellen in the training hall.

“…Should I skip today?”

Perhaps it was because I had to swim like that earlier in the day, but my whole body felt numb. It would get easier once I got used to the training, but that time hadn’t come yet.

-Pitter patter…

Just while I was thinking that, I saw rain splashing against the window. It was already getting dark as well.

That was a pretty good excuse.

Let's just rest today.

I really planned on doing that, but when I went back to Class A's dormitory and saw Ellen entering the training hall, I changed my mind.

Fine.

There was no time to laze around.

Even that overly-gifted girl still worked hard. How could I just play around?

I immediately changed my clothes and headed towards the training hall.

* * *

That day, things went a little differently.

-Kaang! Kang! Kang!

My spars with Ellen always ended after a few clashes, but that time we exchanged a lot more strikes. I even succeeded in pointing my sword at Ellen's neck by deflecting her sword that was about to slash at me.

"…"

That didn't happen because my skills improved or my hard work paid off.

"…Are you not feeling well today?"

Ellen seemed to be in a worse condition—she couldn't concentrate properly. Even if I pushed her like that, I never thought she'd end up losing or conceding the round to me.

“Just… a bit.”

“Are you tired?”

Did she spend too much stamina during our swimming classes? However, Ellen shook her head.

“That’s not it.”

-*Rumble…*

It was raining outside.

Come to think of it, it was raining that night when she somewhat revealed her identity to me as well.

“Do you feel down when it rains?”

On rainy days, Ellen seemed unusually sentimental. I had never given Ellen the attribute that she hated rainy days, but there were a lot of things I didn’t know, after all.

Ellen shook her head at my question.

“No, I like rainy days.”

She wasn’t feeling down because of the rain; rather, she liked it, but why couldn’t she focus?

No, was it because she liked the rain so much that she wasn’t able to focus?

“Want to step out for a bit?”

Ellen nodded at my words.

* * *

Ellen and I left the training room and stepped onto the terrace. It wasn’t the same terrace on which Bertus and I often met; it felt more like an open-air corridor.

Since the rain couldn't reach us there, Ellen and I just watched the rainy scenery outside; it quickly turned into heavy rainfall.

Students were running around in the rain not holding umbrellas because it started raining so suddenly.

'Come to think of it, does this place have a rainy season as well? Since the Capital is based on Seoul, would the rainy season be similar to Korea's?'

If there was a rainy season, it would start around that time.

"I didn't know you liked the rain."

Was she unable to focus on training because she wanted to look at the rainy scenery?

"What about you?" Ellen asked me suddenly while still looking at the falling rain.

"Me?"

"Yes."

Ellen surprisingly took the initiative to ask me something.

"Do you like rain?"

It was shocking that she asked me something like that so suddenly.

"Hmm… I don't really think I like it."

I didn't like it because I thought I might lose my hair in the rain, though I didn't really care about that anymore. Ellen nodded quietly to my answer. She just continued to stare blankly at the scenery drenched in rain.

"Are you close to Charlotte?"

"…What's that all of a sudden?"

Why did this girl that usually didn't show any interest in things suddenly ask me so many questions?

“I’ve just… seen you talking with her a lot. “

Even if we weren’t on super friendly terms, she probably saw me talk to Charlotte quite a bit, although they were just normal conversations. In fact, she must have known that we studied together in Class B’s dormitory during the midterm exam period.

“We’re pretty close… that’s all, I think?”

Our relationship could be said to be closer than others, I guess.

It was kind of weird of her to ask such things all of a sudden when she didn’t usually do that. Did she only pretend to not care? Was it because even though she pretended to be calm, she actually felt kind of lonely?

Ellen had observed the rain up to that point, but then she turned towards me.

“Are you really just close friends?”

“…”

Why was she asking me that? She didn’t seem to be questioning or interrogating me, though.

“Is… there anything else between you two?”

“…Why?”

Was she asking me what I felt about Charlotte? If so, what kind of reaction did she expect from me? But I didn’t really want to answer that. It wasn’t like there was anything else going on between us.

“Well… It’s just that some things happened that concerned both of us. There really isn’t anything between us.”

“…”

Her head drooped a little after she heard my answer. Then she raised it again, turning her gaze towards me.

“You’re like my brother.”

“…What?”

She suddenly told me that I was similar to her brother. How could I be similar to a hero like Artorius?

Ellen was smiling.

However, she looked sadder than ever. She turned her gaze away from me and continued to stare into the rain outside.

“It was a rainy day like this.”

Ellen seemed to be recalling past memories.

“My brother told me that he would be going on a long trip. He just returned from another one of his long trips, but he told me he’d be leaving soon again. He said that he only came around to see me before he left. He told me that he’d be gone for a while but that he would definitely come back and that I shouldn’t worry.”

She was smiling, and yet she didn’t look like she was smiling as she recounted the events of the past she held dearest.

“If he believed he was coming back, then why did he give Lament to me?”

By ’long trip’, Ragan Artorius probably meant his participation in the Demon World War. He probably told her that he would be back soon while knowing that he wouldn’t.

And—while saying he would return—he gave Ellen the divine sword Lament as a keepsake and then left.

She didn’t mean to say that I was similar to the Hero, Artorius.

She only said that I was similar to her brother, Ragan Artorius.

However, I didn’t really know in what way we were similar.

“You know everything about me, but I don’t know anything about you. What are you

thinking, and what are you trying to do? What do you value? You didn't tell me anything about yourself."

It was then that I realized why Ellen brought up that story.

She wasn't asking about my relationship with Charlotte. She was asking how Charlotte and I got closer.

"I knew he cared for me and that I was important to him, but he never told me anything."

Ellen watched the raindrops crashing into the ground.

"I don't know anything about you."

Not too previously, Ellen had told me that she wasn't sure what kind of person I was.

It wasn't because Ellen was slow, it was because I knew exactly who she was, but she didn't have a single idea as to who I really was.

Because Ellen was the closest to me, I knew most about her.

And yet, although she was closest to me, Ellen was the only one that knew next to nothing about me.

It wasn't that Ellen didn't care about me.

She was the one who thought the hardest about me.

Just who is Reinhardt? He's a beggar, a supernatural power user, and he's got a rough personality.

Other than that, I didn't reveal anything else. Neither my family, my background, nor my past.

Ellen realized after she had to think about it that she actually had no idea who I was. It wasn't that she just found it hard to define who I was in one word.

That was why she talked about those things.

I also realized that I actually never really talked about myself to her.

I thought it was because of the rain.

But was she actually unable to concentrate because of me?

Did she think that I was suspicious?

"…You never asked."

At my feeble protest, Ellen just looked at me.

"If I asked, would you have told me?"

"…"

"Why did you look so similar to my brother after he told me that he was going to go on a long trip when I saw you with Charlotte? How could a beggar like you know so much and be able to do so many things? Why do you train every day as if you're being chased by someone? Why are you so anxious? If I asked that, would you answer me?"

"…"

I could give her answers, but those would only be lies. I couldn't tell anyone the real truth.

I'm the beggar Reinhardt, but, in reality, I'm actually the successor of a gang called the Rotary Gang.

That was a lie.

I'm not actually a member of the Rotary Gang, but the son of the Demon King, and I'm attending Temple to prepare for the Gates that will appear later after completely adapting to the Human World.

That was also a lie.

I'm the one who made this world, and I'm here as my punishment for my deeds, so I know the future of this world. I'm the one to blame for all the sad things that happen in

this world you had to go through or will go through.

That was the truth.

I was someone wrapped tightly in many layers of lies. There was no way I could tell Ellen the whole truth.

She wouldn't believe me.

"I can't."

"…"

I don't know anything about you. You never tell me anything. Just like my brother did.

Charlotte didn't notice, but Ellen knew that I would sometimes look at her weirdly because of the guilt I felt. That was why she was asking me about Charlotte.

Why do you look at Charlotte like that when you're only close?

Why do you look at Charlotte with such sad eyes? Why do you look as if you were forced to tell some sad lies?

That was what she wanted to ask.

"…"

I couldn't tell her anything.

She would look through all my clumsy lies. She knew me too well.

Ellen was still looking at me.

"That's why I feel like you two are similar."

Someone who cared about her but never told her anything. That was how Ellen saw her older brother, Artorius. Not the warrior, Artorius.

"That is what I think."

Ellen stared at me.

“And, just like my brother, I feel like you’ll also suddenly disappear one day.”

If things didn’t work out well, that would probably happen. If it was discovered that I was a demon, I would have to disappear from the Capital; I might not even be able to say goodbye to her.

When Ellen thought about me, it seemed like she seemed to have come to the conclusion that I was no different from her brother in that way.

“I don’t want to go through something like that again.”

The thought that I might suddenly disappear was just in Ellen’s head.

However, I knew that it might happen one day. Therefore, I couldn’t tell her that it wouldn’t.

At that moment, no matter what I said, I felt like she would be able to look through all my lies. Ellen didn’t ask me what secrets I was hiding—she might think that I wouldn’t give her an answer, even if she asked.

Ellen then smiled.

“Actually, I hate rainy days.”

There was no reason for Ellen to like rain, as it was during the rain that her brother left her.

“I also don’t like people like you.”

I didn’t see Ellen in the training room after that.

CHAPTER 125

A few days had passed.

It had been raining hard ever since that day. It did stop, sometimes, but it would just rain even more after.

It seemed like the rainy season had started.

Charlotte told me that we should start our investigation after the rain stopped and put the Demon Gods' Church case on hold.

Really, it was Ellen—not Charlotte and the investigation—that mattered.

She didn't just not come to the training room…

She didn't even do her morning workout anymore, and she didn't appear in the dining room at the times she'd usually eat some snacks, either.

I couldn't help but know what was going on.

She was avoiding me. She tried to evade any situation in which she was likely to encounter me unless she couldn't help it.

Even when I saw her in the dormitory, she would only pass me, pretending that I was air. Normally we would not really greet each other or act all close—we would just practice together when the time came and eat together.

However, things felt different from usual. Even when she didn't greet me, she used to at least still make eye contact with me. Ellen didn't even look at me—she was completely ignoring me.

I had a lot of secrets, and I couldn't reveal any of them. Ellen eventually couldn't help but be reminded of her brother.

A person that cared for her but never told her anything, someone that knew everything about her but never told her anything about himself.

She didn't want to be close to another person that was like that. She was sure that I would only end up making her sad, so she decided to just avoid me.

In the end, the newspaper club didn't manage to achieve their original goal of slandering me and ruining my reputation. However, that whole ordeal made Ellen realize a different truth, creating trouble for me in a different way.

It was difficult.

People like Harriet, who would just get irrationally angry, were rather easy to deal with because we could still hold conversations.

However, Ellen was really calm and simply concluded that it would only hurt more to be close to me, so she acted the way she did. She didn't even try to find out my secrets or spread rumors about me for acting suspiciously.

She was very open-minded and told me her secret first, but she never asked me why I never told her anything about me.

She just quietly pushed me away.

Her feelings were understandable.

If she were to continue to be close to me while I didn't tell her anything, it would only stimulate Ellen's trauma; she would keep getting reminded of her brother when she looked at me.

So for the next few days, I just swung my training sword on my own without Ellen. I didn't know whether she locked herself up in her room or trained somewhere else because she didn't want to run into me.

-*Whack! Whack!*

I was beating up a scarecrow with my training sword. Ellen and I wouldn't really talk while sparring, as it was a time to focus on our swordsmanship.

However, I felt really bored because I was doing it alone.

And besides that, there was another problem.

"…"

-Whack! Whack!

"…"

-Whack! Bang! Whack!

There were three people who regularly appeared in the training room:

Ellen, Cliffman, and me.

When Ellen and I sparred with each other, Cliffman would just whack the scarecrows on his own, whether we were there or not.

However, since Ellen hadn't shown up there in the last few days, Cliffman seemed to feel the strange atmosphere around me because my expression was still so stiff.

You guys fought, didn't you?

He was able to tell that much without having to ask. It was the first time Ellen hadn't come there for such a long time during that semester. He seemed convinced that this was the cause.

Fuck, it was awkward.

I had never talked to that guy before, and he had only been focused on his training up until then.

I could feel him fucking pitying me!

-Whack! Whack! Whack!

"…"

-Babang!

"…"

We didn't exchange any words, but I had that weird feeling that we were sharing

some kind of comfort and appreciation towards each other.

Idiot, if you did something wrong, go and apologize immediately.

What? Huh. Ah. I don't know.

We hadn't said a single word the whole time, but it strangely felt like we were having that kind of conversation.

Was that what one called a soulmate?

"…Good work."

He even spoke to me when I was leaving after I finished my training.

"…Yeah."

That was the first conversation I held with Cliffman, with whom I hadn't spoken since my admission in March.

* * *

It was raining all the time, so I couldn't really go out for my morning workout.

I had no one I could talk to. If I told someone that Ellen seemed to avoid me because I had too many secrets, wouldn't they get curious as to what my secrets were? And, to begin with, I couldn't just tell everyone that she felt uncomfortable around me because I reminded her of her brother—Artorius—and the trauma he caused her.

I couldn't tell those things to my classmates or even my seniors. I hadn't spoken to Ellen since.

"…Hey. Can I talk to you for a sec…?"

"…"

In that way, she would just pass me by without even facing me.

Like that the weekend came around before I could solve a single thing.

Those who were quite sensitive to the change in atmosphere noticed that there was a strange air around Ellen and me. Bertus was an example of that; he somewhat seemed to understand the situation, but he didn't want to interfere.

He looked at me as if to tell me, "I don't know what happened, but be strong."

Only Bertus and Cliffman managed to guess what was going on.

"…Did you guys fight?"

…And Harriet de Saint-Owan.

"What do you mean, fight?"

At my words, Harriet tilted her head.

"…Isn't it called a fight if you suddenly don't talk to each other at all after you were practically joined by the hip?"

Were we that close? Wasn't that expression kind of strange? We weren't that close with each other, right?

"That's right. Seems like she had enough hanging out with a weirdo like you for so long."

And that girl…

She somehow looked kind of happy.

"Well, you looked so pitiful that I decided to hear you out."

She seemed motivated to give me advice to help me get through my predicament. In the end, she actually wanted to help me, didn't she?

How cute.

"It's fine. It's nothing like that."

"…What's with this? I really want to do my best to help out. Tch."

However, it wasn't a problem I could tell her, so I had no choice but to only extend my gratitude to her.

"Thanks for caring, though."

"Wha-what?! It's not like I'm caring about you or anything!"

Harriet's face turned tomato red at my empty remarks. I smirked. Normally, that would have been the best opportunity to drop another line, but she really might have been worried about me, so I decided to leave it.

"Did you… really not fight?"

"It's nothing like that."

"Hmm…"

Harriet didn't ask any further, as she was sure that I wouldn't tell her anyway. Although, I felt happy to know that she did care about me. She was probably like Adriana—she saw me as a bad guy at first, but we somehow ended up in a good relationship somehow.

I wondered if that had something to do with human nature.

Or it might have to do with my appearance, as Bertus said.

Harriet and I were just staring absentmindedly out of the window in the hallway.

It was raining. Harriet muttered something as she watched the heavy rain drenching everything in water.

"It sure rains a lot."

"I know, right?"

"It's raining so much, the river might overflow."

"…Is that so?"

The Han river might overflow because of the continued heavy rainfall. Yeah, that

could happen.

“I actually planned on going to the riverside with Adelia this weekend. That river overflowing ruined everything.”

“…Huh?”

Come to think of it, Ellen or the Demon Gods’ Church weren’t that important at that moment.

It seemed like the Han River had already overflowed…

So what happened to the Rotary Gang that lived under the Banpo Bridge? Had they been washed away?

“Huh? W-where are you running off to all of a sudden?”

“I have to go somewhere!”

They didn’t get all washed away, did they?

* * *

I immediately grabbed an umbrella and ran outside of Temple.

-Shaaaaaaa!

It hadn’t turned into a storm yet, but the wind was still very strong, so it was impossible to not get wet even if one had an umbrella. When I got on the mana train to the place where the Bronze Gate Bridge was and got off again, an unbelievable scene unfolded before me within the heavy rain.

-Rumble!

The muddy Irene River was certainly overflowing. The access to the riverside park was obviously controlled by the guards, but even if they didn’t take control of the situation, it wouldn’t have made any difference.

The entire park had already been locked down.

The places under the Bronze Gate Bridge, where one could usually see the gang members drinking and playing dice, were also completely submerged.

It seemed pretty clear that everything got destroyed. Something like that didn't happen in a day or two, so it didn't just happen that day. They didn't get washed away in their sleep, did they?

There weren't many people around because of the heavy rainfall, and the people that were around seemed to be passersby. The gang members didn't seem to be anywhere around either. I walked over to the guard who was guarding the park's entrance. He looked rather pitiful standing in the rain, only wearing a hooded coat without an umbrella.

"Mister!"

"What's the matter?"

"Hey, do you know something about those guys living under that bridge?!"

"Huh? Ah. Those guys? Why are you asking?"

The guards seemed to know about the Rotary Gang. They did stand out quite a bit, after all.

"What happened to them?"

"Aah, they should've run away pretty early on. I mean, they have eyes as well. What's the point in staying under there if they'd just get swept away and die?"

Fortunately, it seemed like nothing serious happened to them.

"Although, those messy shacks and everything else got swept away. It's actually rather refreshing that things got cleaned out like that."

…However, it seemed like something else happened that would pose a big problem.

Also, if they weren't under the bridge, where were they? It was raining, so they probably went somewhere where they could protect themselves from it.

"If it continues to rain so often, we probably won't see those beggars gathering under

that bridge again. But it wouldn't change anything because they'd just flock to other places."

"Where are those other places?"

The guard sighed.

"They probably went to the Wenster Market over there. There aren't any other places where one can hide from the rain around here, you know? It's also filled to the brim with beggars."

The Wenster Market Alley near the Bronze Gate Bridge.

It seemed like there was no other place they could have gone to hide away from the rain in that situation.

* * *

There was a large market street where Seoul's express terminal area should have been. While Yongsan's Shopping Street was a market aimed at adventurers, that huge market street mostly sold food and other daily necessities.

Although the market was open for business, there were only a few people around, perhaps because of the heavy rain. Fortunately, there were awnings and roofs covering the market, blocking out the rain. It certainly looked like a good place to hide from the rain.

Of course, my purpose for going there wasn't to shop, so I just went into a quiet alley with no people in it. I'd just have to find one of the gang members and ask them where Loyar was.

I wanted to help take care of things, but I had to find her first. I also wanted to talk to her in general.

To be honest, I also wanted to confide in someone about my head-breaking situation. The only people I could think of who I could tell about what happened with Ellen were the three demon spies.

Of course, telling Sarkegaar might be too dangerous; he'd probably run rampant on the streets shouting that we had to kill her right away as soon as the name Ellen

Artorius came out of my mouth.

I honestly thought that Loyar probably wouldn't think much of it, but would she give me a proper answer? It probably was best to talk about it with Eleris.

However, since I was already there, I thought I might as well talk to Loyar about it.

I ended up shaking someone that looked like a beggar pretending to sleep while squatting in that alley.

"Mister. Mister."

"Hrmm… Hm. Huh? What d'ya want?"

"Are you a member of the Gang?"

"Gang? What gang ya talkin bout… Shut up and piss off!"

The beggar slapped away my hand and shooed me away as if he didn't want to get caught.

Was that guy unrelated to any group? Well, not all beggars around there were part of the Rotary Gang. According to what the guard told me, that place was originally filled with a lot of beggars.

It was also true that I felt rather impatient because I was wandering around alleys located between the buildings and not where the shops were. Water was pouring out of drainage channels, and the places that had no eaves were letting the rain down unhindered.

Even if it was the Capital, it was still a place inhabited by people. Perhaps because the market buildings were pretty much concentrated there, a lot of trash was scattered about in the alleys. No one would probably notice either if someone died in there.

"…"

I felt like I shouldn't have gone there. What if I met gangsters not part of the Rotary Gang?

“Hey kid, this ain’t a place you can just go in and out of.”

Sure enough, as soon as I thought about it, some bastard that basically had gangster written on his forehead appeared before me in that alley, looking at me and talking to me like that. Judging by his appearance, he didn’t seem to be a beggar.

“Get out of here before ya see some bad shit.”

Fortunately, it seemed like he thought I had lost my way, so he kindly told me to get out. Just because they were bastards didn’t mean they went around beating up everyone they came across. I was going to ask him about the Rotary Gang, but stopped myself.

I had a strong feeling that I shouldn’t stay there for too long.

“Ah, yes. Thank you.”

I didn’t want to make a big deal out of it because my opponent also didn’t seem to want to fight me. At first glance, he looked like some ruffian, but was he the type of guy who had a soft spot for kids? Well, he might also think that he wouldn’t get much money out of me even if he fleeced me.

“Hmm, kiddo.”

“…Yes?”

However, that bastard suddenly called out to me and stopped me.

“Ain’t that the Temple sigil engraved on that umbrella?”

“Ah…”

Since that umbrella was provided by Temple, it had its sigil emblazoned on it. I wasn’t wearing my school uniform, but he seemed to recognize that sigil.

“Yeah, what about it?”

I tried to avoid that situation, but then things became quite annoying.

“If ya a Temple student, then ya must have lotsa money, dontcha?”

He was originally going to let me go because I was still a kid, but after he noticed that I was a Temple student, he changed his mind.

It was true that it was quite the serious offense to harm a Temple student, but that guy probably thought he'd get away with shaking me off, at least.

"Imma look inside ya pockets for a sec."

I didn't really bring that much money, but I definitely had some on me. That guy seemed like someone that had a soft spot for kids, but his attitude made a 180 as soon as he found out that I was part of Temple—which only rich people could attend.

He slowly approached me.

"Money sure is nice, isn't it?"

"No need to worry, kid. If ya just give me some money, imma send you on ya way…"

I used Type B.

Type B was the preset dedicated to close-quarters combat.

"Crazy fucker."

-*Bam!*

"Urk!"

I punched him in the abdomen before kicking him in his groin.

-*Kick*

"Cough!"

-*Crash!*

In an instant, that man collapsed into a pile of garbage, letting out a moan.

"Who are ya to tell me that, huh?"

Who was he to decide whether I could leave or not?

It was up to me whether he left that place walking on his own legs or crawling, to begin with.

CHAPTER 126

The choice of what would happen to the robber was mine from the start.

“U-urg… Cough. You punk… I was tryna do it the nice way…”

“So, you think you’re in a position to decide what should happen to me…”

“Do it!”

“What…?”

Something was wrong.

As soon as I looked back, I could see two people swinging clubs at me.

Fuck.

He wasn’t alone!

Those two were already too close to me for me to react.

-*Whack!*

* * *

When I regained consciousness, it felt like my head was about to crack open. I realized that I had been tied up. I was firmly bound to a chair with rope.

Shit.

Should I have just listened to him? But wasn’t it fucking stupid to let myself get robbed if I was strong enough to overpower a bastard like that?

I had made sure before that he was alone, and my perception wasn’t that low.

When did those guys arrive? Did I not notice them because of the rain’s noise?

The place they tied me up in seemed to be inside some building. I could see a faint light coming through the closed wooden windows; other than that, it was completely dark in there, so I couldn't properly see what was in the room.

"Wake up."

Then I heard the voice of a man sitting on a chair opposite of me in the darkness.

Judging by his voice alone, I was sure that he wasn't the bastard I had just met in that alley. The guy was probably in his late twenties or early thirties. However, I couldn't find out anymore.

"…"

"Even if you know how to fight, if you just swing around your fists recklessly, this is what happens."

That was right.

I punched out because I didn't want to get robbed but ended up getting beaten on the head and dragged to some unknown place.

I had to admit that I was too careless.

I was strong enough to tear apart the rope.

"Hmpf!"

-Creak! Creak!

*"…*You sure are causing a lot of trouble."

However, the rope didn't budge a single bit.

I was completely tied up, so I had no way to escape.

I wondered if I should tell him that things would not end up well for him if he touched me. Although it was true, there were also some stupid bastards that would just get angry and lash out as soon as they heard those kinds of words; there was a high possibility that the man before me was one such bastard.

I knew from experience that not everyone could be reasoned with.

Some would just get carried away by their emotions and let their fists fly. In fact, I had done the same thing.

Damn it.

The biggest problem was that all my belongings got stolen. While Sarkegaar's ring that had invisibility magic cast on it wasn't stolen, the Flame of Tuesday was gone—they probably wouldn't be able to recognize its worth, as it was disguised as some rusty old pendant. If I had that with me, I could have just used those flames to get myself out of that situation.

Should I get it back somehow? No, that would be too suspicious.

He seemed to be examining my belongings spread out on a table. He examined my student ID in the weak light shining through the window.

"Temple Royal Class first year, the name's Reinhardt…"

He read the text slowly, muttering a bit.

"If you're Reinhardt, then you're the guy the Rotary Gang sent to Temple, huh?"

"…How did you…?"

"What? Surprised that I know that?"

The man started chuckling in the darkness.

"There's no way the Thieves' Guild wouldn't know what the Rotary Gang is up to, kid."

What?

Did I touch the Thieves' Guild and not some random street gang?

The Rotary Gang and the Thieves' Guild enjoyed a somewhat symbiotic relationship.

With that in mind, I thought he might release me without any major incidents.

“I don’t like it.”

He started muttering some strange things.

“They should’ve just kept doing what they had always done, not trying to do this kind of bullshit. Sending some kid to Temple… Expanding their business… Now they are openly trying to get out of this.”

The Rotary Gang and the Thieves’ Guild shared a symbiotic relationship.

However, without the Thieves’ Guild’s support, the Rotary Gang wouldn’t be able to survive—their relationship was actually pretty hierarchical.

Loyar was doing everything she could to get out of that structure; after they actually managed to become self-reliant to some extent, she was trying to get out of the Thieves’ Guild’s control.

Soon, there would have been an open conflict between the Rotary Gang and the Thieves’ Guild.

I thought they would just ask for some ransom or something, but that wasn’t the case.

‘Shit.’

“As long as Irene’s Wild Dog disappears, the Gang will also disappear. I heard she isn’t usually that annoying to deal with, but recently she got really hard to control and get a hold of, so this is good.”

It seemed it was the worst possible scenario that I encountered someone of the Thieves’ Guild. I wasn’t fortunate at all.

I felt like that guy was smiling at me in the dark.

“You’ll be the bait to lure out that wild dog.”

They were trying to kill Loyar and disband the Rotary Gang.

I fucking screwed up.

How could I get out of there?

It was impossible to get out of my bindings, even if I used my power—the rope was tied too tightly.

If I had the Flame of Tuesday on me, I could have done something with its fire, but that was impossible.

If things continued, wouldn't Loyar or Eleris come to investigate what was going on? I wasn't completely sure if those two would come, but Sarkegaar would definitely barge in there, wouldn't he?

Well, when I thought about my helpers, I felt somewhat relieved.

As long as those bastards didn't aim for my life but Loyar's, there was no reason for them to kill me. It would be dangerous if they actually managed to target her life.

On top of that, if my predictions were right and I wasn't able to return to Temple after a certain amount of time, they would go crazy looking for me. Maybe Charlotte and Bertus would come forward and do something.

While Bertus might not do anything, Charlotte would definitely do everything in her power to find me.

"Huhu, the Master will definitely be pleased when I tell him."

The guy was cutting his own throat without realizing it.

That was right.

It seemed like a rather tricky situation, but it wasn't actually, right?

After I thought about it, being kidnapped by those guys wasn't that bad; actually, it was a godsend. Wasn't I actually pretty lucky that I ran into the Thieves' Guild?

"Don't be too scared, kid."

I grinned at that man's words.

Yeah, don't get too scared later on as well.

Because you messed up big time, buddy.

* * *

Saturday passed and Sunday soon arrived.

-Shaaaaaaaa!

It was still raining. Harriet de Saint-Owan quietly looked out the window in the lobby of Class A's first-year dormitory.

"Harriet, what are you doing?"

"Huh? Ah…"

Adelia, who majored in magic just like Harriet and was her best friend, asked her the question.

"Let's go to the lab."

"Huh? Oh, you go ahead. I'll come by in a bit…"

"Yes, okay."

Adelia walked off to the dormitory's magic lab while Harriet continued to look out of the window with her brows furrowed.

'Why isn't he coming back?'

Reinhardt hadn't returned to Temple since the previous day.

Of course, it wasn't rare for students to be absent from Temple on the weekend. Bertus and Charlotte, for instance, who went back to the Imperial Palace on the weekend to work, and Liana de Grantz, who liked to spend her weekend in her mansion.

However, Reinhardt tended to remain in Temple over the weekend. Of course, that didn't mean he wouldn't go out at all.

Were there any other places for him to stay outside of the beggar colony under the

bridge?

Seeing him rush out like that in that heavy rain, it seemed like he went to check on the colony. However, he couldn't have spent a whole day there.

Harriet was staying in the lobby to wait for Reinhardt to return. She even pushed all her magic research tasks back.

'What? This makes it seem like I actually worried for him.'

Harriet frowned at that thought. The moment she was about to go to the magic lab, saying that it was completely useless…

"Ah."

Number A-2 Ellen came out of her room, making Harriet stop in her steps.

She clearly felt that the relationship between those two had drastically frozen over the days. While they didn't really talk much together, they always seemed to be together, even eating together, but she had hardly even seen them in the same room recently.

It seemed like Ellen was one-sidedly ignoring him. Reinhardt always wore a complicated expression that was pretty hard to read.

'*Reinhardt, that filthy bastard, did something wrong again,'* Harriet thought.

However, every time she watched that scene, she felt really unpleasant.

"Excuse me."

"Yes."

Harriet called out to Ellen. She stopped to look at Harriet.

Every time she looked into those dark blue eyes, Harriet felt slightly nervous. Nothing really happened between those two, but Harriet was a little reserved towards Ellen; even a bit scared.

"You… What happened between you and Reinhardt?"

"…Why do you ask?"

She didn't say that everything was fine between them but instead asked why she was curious about it.

"N-no, well, just because… That beggar keeps on making that unpleasant face. Also, he went out yesterday and didn't come back… That's all."

"…He didn't come back?"

"You didn't know? He wasn't there for breakfast."

"Ah… I thought he just didn't come down to eat."

Ellen didn't seem to know that Reinhardt had been gone since the previous day.

"I don't really know what's going on. He just suddenly left in a hurry yesterday and didn't come back."

"…I guess he's probably at someone's house," Ellen said as if trying to toss out an answer.

"Would a beggar like him know someone with a house?"

"…It could be."

Did Reinhardt have any acquaintances like that? Harriet didn't think Reinhardt would know anyone who had a house, but she wasn't sure.

Harriet, who openly despised beggars, didn't even consider that thought.

Ellen, however, even questioned the fact that Reinhardt had always been a beggar.

Ellen eventually walked away without telling her what happened between her and Reinhardt.

She then abruptly turned around and headed towards the training room.

She didn't have any specific place in mind, so she just went there, thinking that would be a good plan.

-Rattle

When she opened the door to the training room, Cliffman was there, alone, wielding a training sword. He noticed Ellen, stopped swinging his sword and looked at her.

Like Reinhardt, Ellen had never held a proper conversation with Cliffman before.

“I haven’t seen Reinhardt.”

Cliffman said as if he knew what she was thinking.

“…I didn’t say anything, though.”

When Ellen said that with some hesitation, Cliffman looked a little sullen.

“Huh. Well. Hm. Indeed.”

Pretending that she wasn’t concerned at all, Ellen shut the door to the training room.

Next, Ellen went to the dining room.

No one was there, of course.

“…”

Reinhardt, who suddenly left the previous night, had not returned.

Ellen stood absentmindedly in the dining room for a while and then eventually went back to her room.

‘He probably just went out for the weekend.’

–*Ruuuuumble*!

She didn’t really know where he would go while such a storm was raging on, but what else could it be?

And what did it have to do with her? She decided to place a lot of distance between them, after all.

It was weird that she was even concerned about it.

Ellen tried to stop thinking about Reinhardt.

* * *

Monday.

“I heard that No. 11 didn’t return yet,” Mr. Epinhauser said, looking at the empty seat in his classroom.

“It’s not like he didn’t manage to return on Monday; he’s completely absent…”

The children all looked towards Reinhardt’s empty seat. Even though he was seen as a troublemaker, he wasn’t the type to skip class. Although he was seen that way because of what happened at the start of the semester, his grades were actually excellent, and he did well in the group mission.

Reinhardt’s was a typical case of a person’s reputation getting completely ruined because of a terrible first impression.

Because of that, he still had a somewhat bad reputation.

“He didn’t even apply for an overnight stay, and it was reported that he only planned on going out for a bit, but he hasn’t returned yet… There must be a problem.”

Harriet’s complexion grew pale.

“Did anyone talk to No. 11 before he went away?”

“I-I did!”

Harriet de Saint-Owan raised her hand with an exhausted look on her face.

A-11, Reinhardt, went missing.

Harriet told Mr. Epinhauser that Reinhardt suddenly left when he heard that the Irene River might overflow.

At first, everyone didn’t think he actually went missing. They thought that he might

have gotten into some trouble and couldn't return to Temple for a bit. Anyone would have had that reaction as it was something that seemed plausible in Reinhardt's case.

Of course, contrary to what the students thought, the teachers began to move a lot faster when confronted with a situation in which a student, especially one of Royal Class, might have gone missing.

The Temple Guards, as well as the Imperial Guards, were mobilized to launch a thorough search.

What people thought to be an easy case, or just a small incident, changed when Reinhardt didn't show up until Wednesday. Everyone realized that something strange was going on.

Rumors circulated that he might have touched someone he shouldn't have touched, knowing his temper. Most students thought that Reinhardt might have done that.

It wasn't just the Guards being active.

"His name is Reinhardt; this is his basic information."

Inside one of the mansions of the Imperial Palace, Bertus handed out Reinhardt's photo to someone.

"Find him. His rough location is… Wenster market. Near the Bronze Gate Bridge."

"Yes, Your Highness."

"Of course, don't just look in that place; think for yourself."

"Yes."

The person that received Bertus's orders then retreated.

"I can't believe you actually went out in this kind of weather."

Bertus sipped on his tea and smiled while looking out the window; he observed the pouring rain, his teacup remaining in his hand.

"Annoying bastard."

–Shaaaaaa…

It was raining cats and dogs outside the window.

The same day, a different place.

“His name is Reinhardt; this is a picture of him.”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

This time it was Charlotte who had given a picture of Reinhardt to someone. The person checked over the picture before placing it under his arm.

“Perhaps something happened when he went out, worried that his organization’s base might have become flooded. So, first, check around the Wenster Market.”

“Yes.”

“The fact that Temple’s employees aren’t finding him is because the tracking magic on his student ID isn’t working. Reinhardt obviously took it with him. That means the suspect is aware of the card’s functions. What I’m trying to say is that they aren’t ordinary hoodlums. It’s probably our best option to look for an organization rather than an individual.”

“Yes, Your Highness. I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Please find him as soon as possible. He’s a precious friend to me.”

After the person got his instructions, they quickly stepped away. Charlotte seemed to be unable to hide her melancholy while sitting on her sofa, her chin placed on her hands.

“Sigh… It would have been nice if you just ran into some slight trouble, like usual.”

She mumbled that she wished that he hadn’t gotten kidnapped but rather just flipped some things upside down, like usual.

The Temple Guards and the Imperial Guards weren’t the only ones on the move.

The Imperial Prince and Princess also began to look for the missing Reinhardt.

CHAPTER 127

Despite many people looking for him, there was no progress in finding Reinhardt until Friday.

-Shaaaaaaaaaa…

"…"

Reinhardt was still missing.

Them not finding Reinhardt until Friday might mean that things had already become irreversible.

Ellen trudged through the rain, carrying her umbrella. It had let up a bit, but the damn rain had yet to completely stop. Class was over, and she had nothing to do.

However, Ellen couldn't even remember what classes she had that day.

She couldn't focus on anything because the only thought that went through her head was that Reinhardt might be dead.

Ellen aimlessly walked through Temple.

'I made another mistake again.'

"…"

Everyone had memories that they wanted to erase…

Or a past event they wanted to change.

'Don't lie.'

'Ellen… '

'You don't love me at all. Don't say you love me.'

‘Ellen, what are you saying? I’m your brother… I love you so much.’

Ellen was a quiet person.

However, things hadn’t always been like that.

‘Really? Then why are you leaving me again, giving me this sword while throwing me away like this? Where are you going? What are you going to do? How long will it be? Will you be gone a few years this time? You never tell me anything! You just tell me that you love me! If you’re going to be like that, you don’t have to ever come back! How many days has it been since you last stayed here? You always just tell me that I’ll be someone better than you. So what does that mean? That I should work hard? Why? Why should I work hard? What’s the point of wielding this sword well? Everyone calls you a great hero, but I don’t think you’re such a great person!’

‘Ellen… I’m sorry. I have to do this. All I have to do is… ’

‘Fine! So, that’s what’s important! Everything’s more important than me! More important than family! You won’t even tell me what you’re going to do! Those things have always been more precious to you! Those things you can’t even tell are more precious than me to you! You don’t love us at all! I hate you, brother!’

Then she got slapped.

It was her dad, not her brother.

‘F-father!’

‘Don’t act like a child.’

‘H-hick! sob, waah!’

‘Go, son.’

‘…Ellen. I’m sorry.’

‘Sob! I hate you! I hate all of you! I-I hate every single one of you! And I hate you the most!’

Ellen Artorius hated her brother.

However, she hated herself more than anyone else.

That day.

It also rained just as heavily that day in her memories.

She hated herself for saying those things to her older brother, who left after agonizing over it. She told him that she hated him, not that he loved him. Those were her last words to him.

She didn't immediately realize what was going on. She just thought her brother had left on some very long journey, but she was convinced that he would return to her in the end.

She thought he would suddenly appear on their doorstep again after a few years or so, like always.

However, when she found out that her brother didn't just go on one of his adventures again but went to the Darklands to fight the Demon King, she was convinced that he would never come back again.

It was then that she realized what he had been trying to tell her.

He was prepared to die and finally went to his family to say his goodbyes, only to be attacked by her harsh words.

Thinking about what her brother must have felt back then made Ellen want to kill her past self.

The last face she showed her brother was a crying one, only shouting that he hated him. How hurt he must have been. Just thinking about it made Ellen suffer.

So, since then, Ellen had become less talkative.

Her words hurt someone so deeply before, so she decided to say as little as possible, afraid she would make the same mistake again.

She only gave short answers and only held short conversations. Ellen gradually hid herself in her shell like a snail.

That's how it was.

That was why she didn't say much.

'I hate people like you.'

She made another mistake.

She hurt someone because of her own selfish reasons. She hurt Reinhardt by forcing her own standards on him—standards he had no reason to live by.

The thought that she made a mistake once again came to her after Reinhardt disappeared.

Naturally, she thought Reinhardt might disappear one day, but she didn't think it would be right away.

However, almost as soon as she told him that he actually disappeared…

Reinhardt went missing.

He might have already died.

The last memory of herself that Reinhardt would hold was of her telling him that she hated him.

Did her words turn into a curse that actually made Reinhardt disappear?

Or did he hide himself because her words hurt him that much?

Ellen's thoughts were thrown into such disarray that she came to those ridiculous conclusions.

She had told Reinhardt those words because she thought she'd be okay even without him. She did it because she thought she had to push him away before he became too precious to her.

When he suddenly disappeared, Ellen couldn't help but realize something…

She wasn't okay without him.

She thought she would be, but she wasn't.

"…"

It wasn't easy for her to ignore him, but she wanted to get away from him somehow. Whenever she saw Reinhardt, she thought of her brother, so she couldn't bear it. She felt pained because she remembered how she wronged her brother that night every time their eyes met.

Eventually, she ended up doing the same thing to Reinhardt; as soon as the words slipped out of her mouth, Reinhardt disappeared.

She was careful, and yet she still ended up committing the same mistake again.

In the end, she just did the same thing as before.

Was she getting punished for it?

Was she getting punished for breaking her oath to never make the same mistake again?

Ellen wandered around for a long time until she found someone sitting on a bench. She was standing on a promenade, and it was still raining hard. The only ones around were her and the person in front of her.

It was a girl crying in the rain without an umbrella. She covered her face with both her hands.

"…Hick, sob! Waah!"

Ellen approached the girl quietly and held her umbrella over her.

"…Sobsob… Huh?"

The girl suddenly raised her head when she noticed that someone was holding an umbrella over her. It was Harriet de Saint-Owan.

Normally, she would have been extremely embarrassed if someone caught her crying; Harriet had no intentions of acting like that; she only lowered her head again and continued to cry.

Ellen knew why Harriet was crying.

She knew why she was hiding away, crying in the rain without even an umbrella.

Because she wanted to do the same.

Seeing her like that, Ellen knew what she had to do.

She didn't want to do nothing.

She didn't just want to sit around crying all day like she did when her brother left.

"…Let's go."

"…Sob! Sobsob! H-huh? W-where to?"

Ellen looked down at her, speaking calmly.

"Let's go find him."

Harriet looked up at Ellen, her eyes wide open. She had cried for a long time, so she rubbed her eyes before she nodded to her words.

She didn't specify who they would look for.

"…Okay."

However, even if she didn't, both of them had the same thought in mind.

* * *

Harriet reported to the teachers that she would be resting in her residence in the Capital for the weekend, and Ellen gave them the excuse that she would sleep over at Harriet's house.

It was Friday.

Their classes were already over, so they could go outside of Temple for the weekend.

Harriet changed out of her wet clothes, and Ellen changed out of her uniform into

some casual clothes before they left Class A's dormitory.

-Shaaaaaaaaa!

"What do we do now?"

Both Harriet and Ellen wanted to find Reinhardt, but they didn't know how. They just took their umbrellas with them; they acted rather impulsively.

Harriet tried to wrack her brain for any piece of information she might hold.

She knew that Reinhardt belonged to the group of beggars living under the bridge.

"I think he belonged to some beggars living under a bridge… I think he went out to check on them."

She didn't know how things had developed since then, but she presumed that was his destination at first.

"Do you know which bridge he went to?"

"I… Don't."

There were more than ten bridges going across the Irine river from north to south. They didn't know which one of those bridges was inhabited by the beggars since neither of them was from the Imperial Capital.

Harriet had also realized what Ellen had figured out before.

She didn't really know much about Reinhardt. She had teased him for being a beggar but had no idea where he lived, what he did, and how he came to Temple.

She hadn't even questioned it.

Ellen tilted her head.

"But didn't Reinhardt say he lived with the beggars under the bridge?"

"Ah… Right."

Ellen didn't really know any details, but Harriet at least knew some things because of the rumors.

Cayer Vioden and Erich de Lafaeri followed Reinhardt once, so they saw Reinhardt hanging out with the beggars under a bridge, which meant he wasn't from some great family.

"Vioden and Lafaeri, those two, they would know which bridge he went to."

Harriet knew exactly who to ask.

* * *

The two went to find Cayer and Erich in Class A's dormitory and get some clues.

Those two didn't remember all the details, but they said he seemed to live under the Bronzegate Bridge, so they guessed they were right.

The two asked why they were curious, but Ellen and Harriet didn't say anything further and just got going because if any of it ever reached a teacher's ear, they might get told not to do useless things.

The two were ready to leave the dormitory; however, just then, they encountered a group of people coming out of Class B's dormitory.

"Stop!"

Charlotte seemed a little angry.

"Cha-charlotte…"

"But we have to do something…"

And it seemed like she was scolding Ludwig and Delphin Izadra for some reason.

"What are you guys even going to do? On the contrary, this might even put you two in danger!"

Charlotte was staring at the two who were about to leave the dormitory with both her hands on her hips.

“You’re not the only ones worried about Reinhardt. The teachers of Temple are also mobilizing everything they can. Don’t make things worse; just rest in the dormitory. Reinhardt will be okay. Trust me.”

“Yes…”

“We will…”

It seemed that Delphin and Ludwig planned on going out to look for the missing Reinhardt as well but were caught by Charlotte. The two of them seemed unable to bear with the situation, as they grew rather close to Reinhardt ever since the island group mission.

In the end, Ludwig and Delphin had no other choice but to return to Class B’s dormitory, disappointed. It seemed that they couldn’t go against Charlotte’s extreme momentum. As Charlotte was about to enter after the two of them, she glanced at Ellen and Harriet, who were prepared to go out.

They weren’t really close, but they did know each other.

“…Where are you guys going?”

“We’re le—“

Harriet intervened as soon as Ellen tried to say something.

“We’re, erm, going out for dinner.”

“Oh, really? It’s raining, so be careful.”

“Y-yeah! Thanks for worrying about us!”

Harriet grabbed Ellen’s hand and left the dormitory in a hurry, just in case they would get caught. Charlotte had a stern look in her eyes.

They were from different classes, so she couldn’t do much, but if they were from Class B, she probably would have dragged them back.

Harriet stared at Ellen, who nearly told her the truth subconsciously, but she only tilted her head.

CHAPTER 128

The two left Temple with umbrellas in hand. It was Friday, so they had the whole weekend to look for him. For that reason, Harriet took quite a bit of money with her. Of course, she could just sleep in the Saint-Owan mansion close to the Imperial Palace instead of an inn, but she didn't know what may happen.

The two took the mana train to the Wenster district where the Bronzegate Bridge was. The train wasn't that crowded, but it wasn't completely empty either.

-Aah, hello, dear citizens of the Empire.

-Could you please lend us your precious time for a bit? I would like to introduce to you one of our new items.

Those days, that kind of scene had become common.

Harriet sighed as she looked at the chattering vendors.

…It wasn't because she didn't like what they were doing.

"Sigh…"

"What's wrong?"

"Huh? O-oh, it's nothing."

When Ellen asked her if something was amiss, Harriet just shook her head.

"It's just… I find it strange that I've gotten so used to these kinds of things."

"?"

She sighed because she had grown very used to those kinds of people, to the point where she found it absurd.

Mana trains only ran inside the Imperial Capital. Originally, Harriet mainly traveled

by carriage in her daily life as the young lady of the Saint-Owan Grand Duchy.

Since she entered Temple's high school section, she had a slightly different mindset than the nobles who had been educated there since elementary school.

How are we to be expected to use the same transportation services as the poor?

In the beginning, whenever she had gotten on the Temple intern tram, that was what had gone through her mind. After classes were over, it was virtually impossible to find a seat on the crowded tram, and it was rather annoying to just stand.

Harriet disliked riding in it. However, she had no choice but to get used to the tram because it was forbidden to use one's carriages inside of Temple.

The same thing was true for when she went outside of Temple. Harriet was even more reluctant to use a strange, gigantic, elongated vehicle filled to the brim with the poor and commoners.

Of course, she could ride a carriage outside. There were many people who offered that service.

But very few people living in the Capital actually made use of that option.

Riding a carriage wasn't as fast and cheap as a mana train, after all.

Riding a horse-drawn carriage inside the well-developed Capital was more of a waste of time before one even considered the costs, and time was much more precious there than money. There wasn't anything like a nobility-only carriage in the mana train. There were many nobles who strongly requested for something like that, but the Imperial Family had no intentions of implementing it.

Riding it was uncomfortable for Harriet, but the mana train was the fastest means of transportation—second only to the Warp Gates. However, the use of ultra-short-distance Warp Gates wasn't permitted. If Warp Gates were to be used for such trivial things, they would get overloaded with the amount of people using them.

The speed of the mana train was beyond one's wildest imagination—it couldn't even be compared to a mere carriage.

She really didn't like it, but if she wanted to get from point A to B as fast as possible,

she had no other choice but to take the mana train because anything else would be foolish. At first, she wondered how one could ride such a thing, but in the end, she had no choice but to succumb to its convenience.

Although Harriet was a noble supremacist, she eventually got used to talking to common people and riding the crowded mana train.

'It's all because of Reinhardt.'

That kind of guy that should not have even dared to make eye contact with her, far from someone she would have called her peer, actually talked carelessly to her, even going so far as teasing her. He had even touched her.

He was irritating and ridiculous, but after getting teased by him so much, she grew somewhat immune to such treatment. So, no matter what happened, and no matter what she had to endure, nothing would be worse than Reinhardt—that thought was going through her mind.

That was how Harriet, who was a noble through and through, was able to endure things she normally wouldn't have.

'But now I'm actually on my way to look for that bastard… '

Harriet didn't know what the hell she was doing.

* * *

-Whoooooosh…

The water level of the Irene River around the Bronzegate Bridge had risen dangerously due to the continuous heavy rainfall. The riverside park had already been completely locked down for days.

The two arrived at the place Reinhardt had gone to.

"In this situation, there definitely isn't going to be anything or anyone under that bridge."

"Yeah."

Ellen nodded her head at Harriet's words. If anyone was under that bridge, they would have been washed far away to begin with.

They didn't know much about Reinhardt, so they had to infer Reinhardt's behavior using circumstantial information alone.

Just what happened?

"You said he rushed out after hearing that the Irene River might overflow, right?"

"Yes, I did."

"Reinhardt must have been worried about the people living there."

"I think so too."

Reinhardt was part of the group of beggars living under the Bronzegate Bridge. So, after hearing that the Irene river might overflow because of the heavy rain, he must have gone there to check if his people were safe.

"But the river already overflowed, and all of them have already gone off somewhere. I think he went to find them."

Up to that point, Ellen and Harriet could reconstruct the situation.

Reinhardt must have gone somewhere to look for the missing beggars.

"Then… Could he be late because he was helping them out? But… It's been so long…"

Harriet said so, holding slight hope in her heart. Even as she said it, she knew that it was very unlikely.

Ellen shook her head.

"If that were the case, he could have gone back to Temple to explain the situation to the teachers, but he didn't. Of course, there's still a possibility that it's like that, but… It's very small."

He might not have had the time to go back to Temple simply because he was so busy helping out those beggars that suffered because of the heavy rain. They both thought

that there was a low possibility of that being the case, but that would be better than the other possibilities.

“Anyway, Reinhardt should have gone looking for the place the people living there went to.”

“So we should also look for them… But what if they don’t know what happened to Reinhardt, either?”

Harriet’s words, which showed her concern that something might have happened to him even before he was able to find him, were met with a shake of Ellen’s head.

“First of all, even if they don’t know where Reinhardt is, we should still let them know that Reinhardt is missing. And… they probably know more about Reinhardt than we do.”

No matter if they knew where he was or not, the conclusion they came to was still the same: they had to find them.

“Okay… so where did they go?”

Where did the beggars who lived under the bridge run off to?

They were overcome with the same worries as Reinhardt.

“Let’s ask that person."

A guard was blocking the entrance to the riverside park.

Ellen came to the same conclusion as Reinhardt had.

* * *

Ellen and Harriet succeeded in following the same path as Reinhardt after questioning the guard.

The only place that would protect someone from the rain around there was the Wenster Market street.

The Wenster Market street. While adventurers opted to go the northern Al Ligar

district to do their shopping, the Wenster Market street was the largest market visited by the general public. While they headed there, Harriet hesitated for some reason.

"…My brothers told me not to go to the Wenster Market."

She looked a little scared.

"Why?"

"Ah… My brothers graduated from Temple, so they know the Imperial Capital pretty well. However, I would never go to that kind of place because it's so dirty, but they still told me to never go to the Wenster Market."

"Why did they do that?"

"There are a lot of criminals there. Usually, people wouldn't hurt you as long as you're a Temple student, but there are a lot of crazy people there who wouldn't even consider that. They told me to stay away from the back alleys in particular. There are also some criminal organizations…"

Harriet already knew some information Reinhardt lacked. She suddenly muttered something as if she had just realized something important.

"Ah… No way."

"…I think I know what has happened."

The Wenster Market was a place where criminals hid that would attack you whether you were a part of Temple or not. Reinhardt had gone there looking for some beggars.

If one were to combine those evil criminals with Reinhardt, who had a terrible temper…

It would have been a miracle if nothing actually happened.

* * *

When they started to combine the truth of the Wenster Market with Reinhardt's

personality, they seemed to come to a rough conclusion as to what happened. Harriet gathered her thoughts as they walked towards the Wenster Market.

“So, Reinhardt must have known that the beggars came here to hide away from the rain, and he ended up arguing with someone while he was walking through the back alleys asking where those beggars were?”

"Maybe.”

“So, in the end, he couldn’t reel in his temper, and a fight ensued, but something went wrong… That’s the rough outline of events. It’s probably something like that.”

As they spoke, their faces darkened.

It would have been better if he was just kidnapped or something like that. However, he might have already ended up getting stabbed by one of those criminals.

Reinhardt might have already died. Since that conclusion was pretty plausible, they couldn’t help but make very serious expressions.

Not only that.

“Will… will we be fine?”

They stood before the huge entrance to the Wenster Market.

Harriet was wondering whether they should really go in there or not. Although Reinhardt’s temper was terrible, he ultimately had a talent that could strengthen his body; it was comparable to a combat talent. While he wasn’t as strong as Ellen, after training for a while, he had become pretty strong for his age.

Reinhardt was beaten, so she was wondering if they’d really be fine.

“Let’s look around the market for now.”

Ellen also suggested that they should first investigate and not do anything risky.

* * *

The two entered the market and began to look around. Harriet didn’t look so good,

perhaps because of the overflowing smell of food coming from the market, including the fishy smell of seafood. She had already gotten used to a lot of things, but it was the first time in her life that she ever experienced something like that.

Ellen, as always, didn't seem fazed.

"Oh, you mean that little blonde kid?"

"Yes! Yes! Have you seen him?"

Harriet's eyes lit up at the shopkeeper's words, as he seemed to know something. She threw away her pride as a noble. At that moment, she felt nothing wrong with being respectful towards commoners.

"No, I haven't seen him. But a lot of people are looking for him, so I couldn't help but hear some gossip here and there. Not only the Guards but also people from Temple are running around looking for him; they don't even buy anything."

The Guards—as well as Temple's forces—were poking around Wenster Market.

Charlotte and Bertus had already known that Reinhardt went missing in Wenster market just by considering the outside factors as well, so they had ordered people to focus on the area.

"It must be nice being a Temple student. Just because one little kid went missing, all those people stopped whatever they were doing and searched for him in a frenzy. I sure wish I could send my kids to Temple when I have enough money."

The shopkeeper suddenly started to ramble. Even though it was just a single Temple student, seeing so many people turning the whole market upside down just to ensure the safety of a single person made one realize how great Temple's prestige was.

Of course, not only was Reinhardt a Temple student, he was also part of Royal Class; he was already on a completely different level than an ordinary student. Reinhardt's classmates were the Imperial Prince and Princess, for crying out loud.

The two continued to walk around the market, asking around the shops, but they only heard that other people had already combed through the area to find Reinhardt; they didn't find even a single eyewitness.

“This is strange.”

“…Yeah.”

Both of them felt that it was strange. Harriet dragged Ellen to a place that smelled less fishy and began to describe what exactly was strange.

“I think both the Guards and Temple’s forces already knew that Reinhardt disappeared in this place.”

“ Yes.”

It wasn’t a difficult conclusion to come to, so those forces that were looking for Reinhardt already paid great attention to the Wenster Market.

“Then why couldn’t they find him?”

If they searched the market, they should have searched the back alleys as well. There was no reason for them to be afraid of the criminal gangs roaming the back alleys. Reinhardt’s disappearance was believed to have occurred last Saturday, and the search began on Monday.

However, they made no progress until Friday.

Why couldn’t the Guards and Temple’s forces find Reinhardt? If he was dead, they should have at least found his body, but they didn’t.

They could see some Guards patrolling the entire market even then.

“If they are looking for him so hard and couldn’t find him, there probably isn’t anything in the back alleys either…” Harriet mumbled sadly.

“But let’s go look anyway.”

“Yes.”

They didn’t think they would find any clues in the back alleys, but they had no other choice but to check there as well.

CHAPTER 129

Ellen and Harriet cautiously proceeded through the maze of complex alleys between buildings.

“If they see us, the Guards will tell us to leave because it’s dangerous. We have to stay far away from them.”

Unlike before, because of Reinhardt’s disappearance, the back alleys were lined with guards, not criminals. Harriet nodded at Ellen’s words.

“I learned a noise-canceling spell this time. Let me cast it on us and move along.”

“Yes.”

“It would’ve been nice if I actually learned invisibility magic, but we’re not that far ahead yet.”

“It’s okay.”

Harriet had learned some new magic spells since the island mission; she learned them because she had already experienced a situation in which the magic spells she thought of as useless were actually very useful.

The underwater breathing spell and the heating ball summoning spell were two such examples. They were the lowest level of magic spells that one could learn without much effort, and yet they were such a great help to Ellen and Reinhardt in gathering food for the group and in helping everyone maintain their body temperature during the torrential rain.

In fact, many of the attack spells she learned, even if they were powerful, didn’t actually see much action. Due to how long it took to cast them, their practicality was greatly reduced as well.

In the end, after the group mission was over, Harriet started to think a bit differently about what was and wasn’t useful magic.

Low-level magic, such as noise suppression magic, would have been a great help when they were hunting on that island. So Harriet had passed on higher-level magic to learn more useful magic which could be used right away, noise canceling was one of them.

After the short casting time was over and the magic activated, the noise Harriet and Ellen emitted was greatly reduced, if not completely gone.

Ellen took the lead.

It was raining, so the smell wasn't that intense, but if it had been hot, that space would have been filled with a nauseating stench.

Piles of unidentifiable garbage, food remains, and traces of urine were scattered everywhere—visible for anyone to see.

Harriet was not used to something like that; she tried not to look. She was so upset when she actually saw a rat running past her, it was a miracle that she didn't scream.

Fortunately, it was raining and they had noise-canceling magic cast on them; the Guards couldn't hear those two girls moving about.

"What are all these buildings?"

Even while being uncomfortable, Harriet seemed to be curious about the buildings they found in the back alleys of the market.

"They are probably homes."

"Homes? At a place like this?"

How could people live in buildings so close to each other? Aren't these places like anthills?

Harriet showed the typical reaction of a noble that couldn't understand the way commoners lived.

The back alley streets behind the market, which were as complex as a maze, were completely silent except for the occasional Guard passing by.

Sometimes they would see homeless people crumpled in the alleyways, sleeping.

When Harriet saw one, she froze and wasn't able to even get close to him. Ellen approached him instead.

"Mister."

"Hey, be careful…"

"Uh, uhm… What? Who are ya? Oh~ what are pretty ladies like you doing in a place like this?"

"We're looking for a guy with blonde hair about this tall. His name is Rein…"

"Ah, I don't know. How many times do I have to say that I don't know that guy?"

The homeless guy couldn't give them an answer, seeming as if he had been asked several times before.

Following that, Ellen found a few more people that seemed to be homeless people, not criminals, but all of them only told her that they didn't know anyone called Reinhardt, as if they were already tired of it.

After wandering around for a long time, trying to evade the Guards, Ellen and Harriet ended up with no new results.

"…I think everyone here has already been questioned about Reinhardt's disappearance."

"Yeah."

They were beggars, but none of them knew Reinhardt, and the criminals that haunted those places already hid away because of all the Guards.

Did they even have to break into those buildings to ask if they were criminals or if they knew Reinhardt? However, it was already pretty clear that the Guards already did something similar.

They both wanted Reinhardt to return safely, yet hadn't been able to find him. Harriet then spoke her next words rather carefully.

“Everyone has already searched every nook and cranny of this place… And if they didn’t find any clues after such a long time, I don’t think it would make sense for us to wander around here even more.”

In the end, they came to the conclusion that it would be meaningless for them to continue to search through the Wenster Market.

* * *

Harriet and Ellen left Wenster Market, going out onto the street again. The Market was already covered by others. It wouldn't change a thing if they were to be added to the mix.

“Did Reinhardt actually not come here?”

“I don’t know…”

The fact that the Guards hadn’t found Reinhardt yet, even though they combed through the place Reinhardt supposedly disappeared at, might mean that it wasn’t the place of his disappearance.

It was possible that Reinhardt didn’t actually go to that place. The reason why all the criminals that could have been kidnapped disappeared like that all of a sudden could be because they felt threatened by the sudden appearance of so many Guards.

Then where the hell should they start to look for Reinhardt?

“There are a lot of strange things about this situation."

Harriet raised another question.

“What?”

“The guards… questioned most of the beggars here, didn’t they?”

“Yeah.”

They did it to the point that the beggars were sick of hearing that question.

“The criminals ran away, but the beggars stayed in this place.”

“However, it seems like none of the beggars that lived under the bridge came here. None of them knew Reinhardt.”

The beggars that lived under the bridge.

According to the Guard, the beggars should have come over to the Wenster Market to take shelter from the rain. If they didn’t want to get completely soaked, they would have no other choice but to go there. The Guards weren’t really kicking them out of that place. That’s why the beggars remained in the back alleys whether the Guards were patrolling or not.

There were beggars, but none of them were the ones that knew about Reinhardt.

“They never went to the Wenster Market.”

Ellen nodded at Harriet’s reasoning.

“I think we have to find those people first.”

“Yes.”

Wenster Market, the most clear trail, was already crowded with people. If that place held any type of clue, it would be found someday, even if they weren’t there.

The two decided to look for the beggars of the Bronzegate Bridge, a group no one really cared about. Everyone else had only focused on the Wenster Market.

* * *

Their theory was correct.

Neither the forces of Temple nor the Guards focused on that lead under the assumption that Reinhardt disappeared in Wenster Market. They were trying to find some criminal gang that was connected to Reinhardt’s disappearance.

Reinhardt hadn’t even found the group of beggars he was looking for at that point.

That was the problem with people who only did what they were told to do. That was the reason why Temple’s forces and the Guards were only concentrating on the fact that Reinhardt definitely went to Wenster Market.

So Ellen and Harriet came to the decision that they should go somewhere else because other people were already covering that place.

Those beggars that lived under the bridge were a bunch that stood out quite a bit, even the Guards knew them well.

Although they didn't seem to impose any sanctions on them, they didn't really like them, either. Ellen and Harriet hadn't seen them in person, but they imagined them drinking booze and chattering under the bridge. That definitely wouldn't have been a pretty view.

Ellen and Harriet reached the entrance to the riverside park where they first gathered information to look for that guard again.

However, there was a different person standing guard, probably because that other guy's shift was over.

"Oh, those beggars? At times like these, they'd probably go to Wenster m—"

"They aren't there."

When they were about to get the same answer as before, Ellen cut him off. It was highly likely that Reinhardt went there, but the beggars were definitely not there.

"Hmm… Really? Then where would they have gone on rainy days like this? They don't even have houses or anything, you know?"

It rained a lot those past few days and they couldn't stay under the bridge in that situation, so the only choice they seemed to have was to head towards Wenster Market.

One of the guards chimed in after hearing the other talk.

"Well, don't they make a lot of money these days? Maybe they don't have to go to the market anymore. Who knows? Maybe they even found some inn to stay in."

"Money? What money would beggars have? And an inn? That's funny."

When the other guards were laughing at his statement, treating him as if he was talking complete nonsense, he started to chuckle.

"Those bastards aren't selling cheap candy anymore, you know? They are now selling knick-knacks on the mana train. Didn't you notice? That's why we don't get any complaints from people visiting the riverside park anymore. But I'm sick and tired of seeing those guys every time I go to work."

"…You're telling us that those vendors were those beggars?"

"Yeah, they are pretty active, aren't they?"

Ellen and Harriet's eyes met as they were listening to the Guards' conversation.

'Aah, greetings, dear citizens of the Empire.'

'Could you please lend us your precious time for a bit, I would like to introduce to you one of our new items.'

The two had already found their target without even knowing.

* * *

The only people interested in the job change of the beggars from under the bridge were people of the same 'trade' and the underworld. So there were only a few people among the guards who knew that the beggars became train vendors.

Beggars were still beggars, people often didn't care about who they actually were, and the vendors were just a mild annoyance, so no one wondered about their background.

Anyway, unlike the solicitors in the riverside park, the mana train vendors could continue their business regardless of whether it rained or not. They were still going from train to train to sell their wares even during the rainy season.

Ellen and Harriet immediately boarded a mana train, not caring where it went.

"I hope they know where Reinhardt is."

"Yes."

Both hoped that nothing bad had actually happened to him and that he was absent from Temple for such a long time because of something else. The two moved from

compartment to compartment of the mana train, looking for those junk sellers.

They didn't have to look for long. After moving through four compartments they found a vendor who was twirling a spinning top on the floor and talking excitedly about the 'magic spinning top'.

It was no wonder that people wouldn't connect the vendors with the beggars living under the bridge.

According to Reinhardt's instructions, the merchants riding on the train were properly dressed and cleaned up.

"Aah, everyone, let me tell you about this spinning top…"

"Excuse me, mister."

As was to be expected, Harriet was still pretty shy, so Ellen stepped up to the guy. When Ellen called out to him, the merchant smiled.

"Hello there, it's only one silver coin."

He seemed to think that she talked him up because she was interested in the spinning tops lying on the floor. Of course, Ellen had no interest in those things whatsoever.

"Do you know Reinhardt?"

"…Reinhardt?"

The vendor tilted his head when she said that name out of nowhere.

* * *

Fortunately, he knew Reinhardt.

"That guy's missing?"

"Yes."

As soon as he heard that he immediately picked up his spinning tops and got off at

the next station. Harriet and Ellen followed him, and when they reached a quiet place, they started to talk.

“You didn’t know?”

“This is the first time I’ve heard of this… This is a big problem. I should let big sis know about it.”

What did that mean?

However, the peddler seemed to feel compelled to immediately report the matter to someone.

“Thank you, you two. But you guys…”

“We're Reinhardt’s classmates.”

It seemed like he wanted to send them away, but Ellen and Harriet were burning with determination; they would follow him no matter what.

The vendor couldn’t win against those two, who’d inevitably follow him whether he liked it or not, so he had no other choice but to head towards the Rotary Gang’s current base with them.

Ellen and Harriet were forced to realize that it was only natural that they weren’t able to find the Bronzegate beggars in the Wenster District’s market street.

The vendor was heading towards the southernmost area of the Imperial Capital.

“I heard that you were staying close to Bronzegate.”

The vendor shook his head at Ellen’s words from underneath his umbrella.

“It was like that at first, but we’re gradually trying to settle down properly.”

They were slowly trying to get away from Bronzegate. That was why they moved their base completely while it was raining, that was how he explained it.

However, where they were going was close to the border between the Capital and the outside area. Only after riding the train until the end did they get off.

This was a remote area with only a few buildings and even fewer people.

They couldn't help but feel nervous because they were heading to such a deserted place. 'What if this person wasn't a good person?' These types of thoughts bubbled up in them.

"…I'm scared."

"It's alright."

Harriet was speaking in halting words as if her voice was failing. As a response, Ellen whispered to her that she had nothing to worry about.

That put her mind at ease when she thought about how great Ellen, who was able to fight orcs on her own in the jungle, was.

Even if that vendor thought about harming them, it would be in vain—he was definitely easier to deal with than those orcs.

Fortunately, she could lay those worries to rest, as they were able to see a huge tent after they walked with the vendor for some time. It was set up in a distant and quiet vacant lot. Inside the tent, one could hear the loud roaring of people.

They could also see a construction site. It seemed like they were building something.

"Are… are they constructing a building?"

"I think so."

It was raining, so they weren't continuing the construction at the moment, but looking at the pillars and constructions, it seemed like they were trying to build a fairly large building.

"Alright, you guys followed me here and I brought you here, but once you get in here, you have to be careful of what you say."

"Careful?"

The vendor saw Ellen tilt her head and nodded his head.

“Big sis’s personality is quite… Just know that she doesn’t care whether you’re a Temple student or not.”

Ellen nodded and Harriet sighed in slight annoyance that she had to be careful around a mere beggar. Harriet was a great noble who shouldn’t have a reason to talk to such lowly people in normal circumstances.

The large tent was completely open at one side so that people could look into it from outside. They thought that those beggars’ appearance and conduct would be incredibly shabby, but they were a little different from what Ellen and Harriet had imagined.

Although they seemed to have a hard time managing due to the heavy rain, compared to the shabby beggars they encountered in the Wenster Market, they seemed like nobility. Everyone was wearing proper clothes, after all.

“…Yo, what’s with the kids?”

Their eyes widened slightly when their colleague returned with the two girls following him.

“…These girls grew up fine, didn’t they?”

Even though Harriet was wearing casual clothes, one could still recognize her as a first-class noble or someone very wealthy, and Ellen looked far from a beggar as well with the energy she emitted and the clothes she wore. Their bearing and attitude were also indicative.

Harriet looked a little exhausted, and Ellen was calm. Still, the people started to mumble at the sudden appearance of those two pretty girls.

A young woman with messy white hair stood before them. Her attire wasn’t much different from the others, but the pressure those golden eyes emitted showed that she wasn’t an ordinary person.

Irene’s Wild Dog.

“Who’re these kids?”

Loyar frowned when she saw Ellen and Harriet standing before her.

The two introduced themselves as Reinhardt's classmates.

"…Is that so? But how did ya find this place?"

Loyar seemed wary about why those two who seemed to be Reinhardt's classmates went there. The only reason she could think of was that they might have found some clues to Reinhardt's hidden identity.

"Reinhardt went missing."

"…What did you say?"

Not only Loyar, but all the club members present were completely shocked.

Originally, the Thieves' Guild planned on using Reinhardt as bait to catch Loyar.

However, a long time had passed since then, and the Rotary Gang was completely unaware of Reinhardt's disappearance.

CHAPTER 130

Ellen explained to Loyar about what happened at Temple and the events following it. She told Loyar that Reinhardt was worried about them, so he headed to Bronzegate, and he was presumed to have disappeared after heading to Wenster Market; so Temple's forces and the Guards were scouring the area at the moment but hadn't found a single lead as of Friday.

"Damn it. In this situation, he…"

Loyar ground her teeth. Things weren't going well. The Rotary Gang was about to move there with all its members except those that worked on the trains when that heavy rain had suddenly swept away their base under the bridge.

They had started building some basic constructions, but they weren't finished yet. However, while they were doing that, Reinhardt went to visit Bronzegate and encountered quite a weird situation.

Loyar wasn't in any position to relax—faced with the fact that Reinhardt had gone missing. It was an unprecedented situation.

"Okay. We'll take care of this from now on. You guys go back to Temple."

If those two hadn't appeared out of nowhere, the Rotary Gang might have overlooked such a serious matter. Although she felt grateful towards them, Loyar thought that those two girls' roles were over.

"We want to look for him with you."

"…Huh?"

However, the girl who took the initiative shook her head, saying she wouldn't be going back.

"Well, I know what you're thinking… You guys are still young. Just go back; you might end up seeing some real ugly things."

Loyar lightly grabbed Elen's shoulder and tried to shove her outside the tent.

-Swish

However, Ellen slightly pivoted to avoid Loyar's touch.

"…?"

"…"

Did she just avoid me?

Loyar tried once again to grab Ellen with one of her hands.

–Swish

However, Ellen took a step forward to avoid Loyar's hand.

After those two failed attempts, the slightly buzzing atmosphere started to cool down.

What were they going to do now?

That's what the people around them were thinking.

"Hoh."

Loyer decided to go with a slightly rougher method rather than trying to get it over with gently. To her, that girl seemed like someone that wouldn't listen to words, after all.

She tried to grab Ellen a lot faster—her hands moved incredibly fast.

-Swish

"…"

"…"

However, Ellen avoided her touch with just a single step again.

The atmosphere around them was really chilly.

Loyar had gotten pretty serious, but that little girl still managed to avoid her with just a single step.

Harriet already felt really exhausted by the strange war of nerves going on before her; she figured it wasn't such an unusual thing.

"Because you're Reinhardt's friend, this is the last time I'll let this slide. Go back while I'm still being nice."

"We can help too."

"Sigh."

There was some slight anger flickering in Loyar's golden eyes.

Was it because she was a Temple student?

She seemed confident in her physical prowess. In that case, she wouldn't mind rougher treatment, right?

Loyar struck her hand out almost as fast as lightning. She intended to grab Ellen by the nape, not her shoulder, and throw her out.

-Swish!

However, after reading the hand's trajectory, Ellen moved her head down to the right to evade it and took another step back.

"I have no intention of fighting you."

Ellen calmly avoided her move again; she even expressed that he had no intention of attacking her.

"Huh…"

However, it was that type of behavior that made people with a fiery temperament like Loyar attack even harder.

I have no intentions of fighting you = If I get serious, you'd only get hurt.

That was the only thing she could glean from that.

The gang members had their mouths wide open as if they couldn't believe their own eyes.

None of them had ever seen Loyar lose when it came to close-quarter combat. Whether they were twenty or thirty people, she was able to beat all of them without getting hit even once. In fact, some of the guys there served her as their boss after they got beaten by her personally.

However, that little girl was avoiding Loyar's hands quite easily, which made her angry.

Was it because she was from Temple? Were all Temple students like that?

Everyone had a startled expression on their faces.

"Brat, just listen to me. I'm doing this because I'm worried for you guys. I think I know what's going on here and, if I'm right, Reinhardt might still be fine. If you go back, I'll promise you that Reinhardt will be back at Temple soon, safe and sound."

It was her last attempt at persuasion. If Ellen made another move, Loyar's patience would really snap. She was already at the edge of her patience.

Ellen was Reinhardt's classmate, and she had gone all the way there to let her know that Reinhardt was in trouble, so she felt rather grateful. As such. she was willing to at least concede that much.

However, Ellen still shook her head.

"I want to go with you."

"Fine."

– *Crack, crack*

Loyar's golden eyes gleamed.

“Let’s do this then.”

-*Whoosh!*

Loyar rushed towards Ellen and punched out at her.

Ellen’s eyes widened slightly as she saw Loyar rushing at her at a speed that made her first attempts seem like a joke.

‘Too… Fast!’

-*Bang!*

“Kuhuk!”

“Arg!”

As Ellen got hit, Harriet cried out.

She wasn’t able to dodge it but she still guarded. Ellen crossed her arms to block Loyar’s punch but still bounced back and even got sent flying for a bit. Ellen managed to get up after rolling a few times.

“Hah, huff… Huff…”

She only got punched once, and yet she was wondering if that had broken her arms.

Loyar, who had completely lost her temper, seemed unwilling to stop at only that; she rushed towards Ellen, who had already landed outside the tent.

‘That person, just who is she?'

Not only was Loyar incredibly fast to the extent that it almost felt like an invisible ghost was attacking her, but she also seemed to put an invisible pressure on her body as well as her spirit.

Ellen didn’t know that it was the type of pressure Lycanthropes usually applied to their opponents, but there were alarm bells ringing in Ellen’s head that she wasn’t fighting an ordinary person.

"I think I'm going to die if I fight her halfheartedly."

Just as Loyar was sincerely facing her, Ellen also started thinking that she might really die if she just focused on avoiding her attacks. She didn't know what Loyar was thinking, but those shivers that rushed all over her body and made all her hairs stand on end made Ellen come to that conclusion.

-Whoosh!

Loyar punched out again, but Ellen didn't avoid it. She leaned forward and got closer.

-Pang!

She punched Loyar in the stomach.

The solar plexus was one of the human body's weak points.

"Just now…"

However, Loyar seemed more angry than hurt. After she got hit in her stomach, Loyar's eyes filled with even more rage.

"Did you go easy on me?"

"!"

Ellen thought that her opponent might die if she used all of her power, so she had controlled her strength, which annoyed Loyar.

That punch was enough to make an ordinary person faint, but Loyar didn't even flinch.

The places that were supposed to be weak points weren't actually weak points to her. Ellen couldn't help but freeze up.

-Bang!

"Urg… Huk!"

Loyar hit Ellen in the stomach with her knee, making her fly away and roll on the

floor.

* * *

The Temple student and Irene's Wild Dog were fighting in the rain. Ellen was barely holding out, even though she tried not to appear as such.

-Punch! Pow! Punch!

In the middle of nowhere, a huge hand-to-hand battle was taking place, but the results were already pretty clear—even in regards to technique.

In terms of physical strength, Ellen was definitely lacking.

"Hey, don't you have to stop her?!"

"Y-you're right, but…"

"If we were to touch them now, how many of us would end up getting our arms and legs crippled?"

Loyar's eyes completely lost any sort of reason, so she wasn't in a state in which she could be stopped.

Harriet was shocked for a different reason.

Ellen was able to beat an orc with ease, but she was getting pushed back at the moment.

The gang members were surprised that a little kid was able to fight against Irene's Wild Dog so well, while Harriet couldn't believe that Loyar was able to overwhelm Ellen, the strongest of their class—even if Loyar was an adult.

"Huff… Urg…"

Loyar was still staring at Ellen, gasping in the rain. It was true that Loyar had flown into a rage, but she didn't stop thinking.

'She's worse than a beast.'

The other party was inferior in strength, skill, speed, and dexterity compared to herself, but the only thing that had kept Ellen going and withstanding her attacks had been those ridiculous reflexes of hers. Not only did she manage to avoid a lot of her attacks, she even managed to guard when she was able to.

Loyar seemed to be serious, but she wasn't actually.

Loyar was planning on only beating her opponent slightly. Otherwise, Ellen would have already ended up with two broken arms after her first attack.

She tried to only apply enough force to make her give up, but it wasn't that easy.

'They are raising monsters in Temple, it seems.'

Even though she was still young, defeating her wasn't that easy if she didn't have the determination to actually kill her. Were there more monsters like that in Temple?

No.

"Gasp… Huff…"

The girl in front of her was special. Wasn't the other girl that came with her actually trembling in fear at the moment?

'Should I kill her?'

That was what Loyar was thinking while keeping her distance from Ellen.

An unprecedented monster raised by Temple. If she already reached that level of skill at her age, she'd only grow into even more of a monster as the years went by.

If she killed a Temple student, she would have to leave the Capital, or else she would harm the members of the Rotary Gang. She would be unable to come back to the Imperial Capital ever again.

However, if she left that girl alive, she would pose a tremendous threat to the reconstruction of the Demon Realm.

They had said that they were Reinhardt's friends, but they probably only grew closer because they had no idea about the truth; they'd surely end up becoming mortal

enemies in the future.

Monsters like those had to be killed off before they could grow. No one would be able to kill them in the future, after all.

Why did Reinhardt become friends with such a monster? How did they even become friends?

She couldn't pass any judgment on her without Reinhardt. Loyar believed in Reinhardt's words: that he planned to rebuild the Demon Realm.

However, his friendship with Ellen might also be some kind of scheme he came up with, right?

She had to come to a decision on her own at that moment.

This punk.

Obviously, he'd be very upset if I did this.

Even though she was all prickly on the outside, Loyar never intended to betray Reinhardt in the slightest.

If I killed her, would His Highness get into trouble with Temple? Would it be more difficult if I kept her alive?

If she killed her, it would cause problems for her master.

But it was more troublesome to keep her alive.

She firmly believed that Ellen would be a fatal threat to the reconstruction of the Demon Realm.

If they didn't kill her now, they wouldn't get a second chance.

It would be better to kill her and evacuate her master out of Temple and plan out their future moves in a different place.

No, I can't leave her alive.

Loyar boosted her whole body's senses. It wasn't just a normal battle anymore; she entered into her real combat mode.

She used the powers of a Lycanthrope, not Irene's Wild Dog.

'Your Highness.'

Ellen swallowed her saliva as she witnessed Loyar strengthening her body to such a degree.

'I'm going to commit an unforgivable sin to you.'

No matter how right she thought her decision to be, she was still planning on killing her master's friend.

Loyar leapt forward with both her hands outstretched, not punching out with her fists. She didn't even need to do that. In that situation, if she was able to get even a single finger in, she would make her opponent explode.

"!"

Ellen felt it clearly when she saw Loyar rushing towards her. It was in her opponent's gate.

It was killing intent.

She was trying to kill her.

Ellen was able to sense it almost instinctively.

With her eyes wide open, Ellen swung her right arm at Loyar, rushing towards her.

At the same time, something was suddenly summoned into Ellen's hand.

-*Whoosh!*

'This… this is!'

Ellen, who didn't have anything with her previously, suddenly held a sword in her right hand.

-Kaklang!

And Loyar reflexively blocked the sword being swung at her with her right hand.

The sword came to a halt after cutting halfway into Loyar's hand.

"!"

Everyone was staring at the unidentified sword that suddenly appeared in the girl's grasp with astonishment.

CHAPTER 131

Silence fell over the vacant lot veiled in rain.

The sword that suddenly appeared wasn't able to cut off Loyar's hand; it got stuck after cutting into it halfway.

A sword had suddenly appeared in the little girl's previously empty hand.

And Loyar had managed to block that sword with her bare hands.

Two very unbelievable things happened at the same time, leaving everyone's mouths hanging wide open.

-Kick!

"Kuhuk!"

Loyar didn't grab the sword, even while it was still stuck in her right hand, and instead kicked Ellen's stomach and stole the weapon.

-Scatter…

However, the stolen sword immediately disappeared from Loyar's hands—it was as if it had never even existed; then it appeared in Ellen's right hand again.

Loyar glared at that sight.

It clearly wasn't a sword made using summoning magic.

'Soul bound?'

A sword that was bound to the owner's soul… That was a possibility.

However, there were only a few swords capable of such a feat in the world.

"Urg…"

Ellen staggered while trying to stand up. Her whole body was drenched in rain, but Ellen still stared at Loyar with a firm expression etched on her face. Loyar couldn't explain it, but she felt that Ellen wanted to kill her as much as she wanted to kill her at that moment.

The others didn't realize that Loyar was actually trying to kill Ellen.

However, Ellen had already accumulated a lot of damage. If Loyar charged at her as she had before, Ellen would surely die.

"Why are you… doing this to me?"

Ellen couldn't understand the situation.

Loyar silently looked at Ellen.

She was a completely unknown girl carrying something like a soulbound sword.

It wasn't possible for her to recognize what that sword was, but it was clear that it held extraordinary powers.

Why did a girl like her carry something that shouldn't exist in the world anymore?

Her heart told her that she should go on and kill her, but Loyar was even more confused than before.

Did Reinhardt know this girl's identity? Or did he not know? If he knew, why didn't he tell me about this monster yet?

Could it be that this girl's existence was already part of Reinhardt's grand plan?

She had no idea who the girl was, but it was clear that she was an even bigger existence than she initially thought.

And someone like that was running around in the rain looking for Reinhardt. She was destined to be their enemy no matter how she thought about it, but Loyar was inclined to think that Reinhardt wouldn't have become friends with someone like her without having a plan in mind.

Loyar wasn't able to strategize as well as Sarkegaar or Eleris.

'I'm glad I failed.'

I shouldn't have done something without any orders.

Loyar's mind was buzzing with so many thoughts that she almost caused a massive disturbance in Reinhardt's grand plan.

She didn't know who Ellen was, but she was someone she shouldn't touch.

"You should know the difference between us now."

Loyar looked down at Ellen, who was shriveled up in a sullen mood.

She didn't want to hurt her any further, but she still didn't plan on taking her on her search for Reinhardt either.

The girl was dangerous, but she wouldn't be of much help as she was.

"Go back. You'll only get in the way."

How the fuck are you going to help me when you're so fucking weak.

That was what Loyar was trying to communicate with her eyes.

"…"

Ellen had no other choice but to hold her head low while clenching her teeth.

* * *

"Is this really okay…?"

"…Yes."

In the end, Loyar was able to subdue Ellen and told them that she would return Reinhardt to Temple safe and sound, so they should just take their mind off of the matter and go back to Temple. Ellen just silently walked through the rain, letting go of her umbrella, and Harriet followed her, carefully trying to cover the two of them with her umbrella.

Harriet couldn't tell what Ellen's expression looked like as she was walking with her head down.

However, after suffering an overwhelming defeat for the first time in her life, Ellen's expression completely hardened.

'I even summoned Lament… '

She summoned Lament because she felt her life was in danger, but that sword was only able to slightly dig into that person's palm.

She wasn't an ordinary person. A normal person wouldn't have been able to block that divine sword with their bare hands. No, normal people wouldn't even be able to block normal swords like that.

However, her opponent managed to completely block the divine sword like that.

That gray-haired woman seriously tried to kill her, but when she saw her sword, she changed her mind and let her go.

Ellen didn't know why Loyar tried to kill her, and she understood even less why she had decided to keep her alive in the end.

"W-well, there were a lot of people… They probably know something… They'll definitely find Reinhardt. Yes."

Harriet made some exaggerated gestures, trying to paint the situation as positively as possible when she noticed that Ellen didn't say anything. She was dying to know what that sword that Ellen summoned was, but Ellen's condition didn't look so good at the moment.

What the hell.

Despite how quickly Ellen swung it at the head of that beggar organization, she still managed to block the divine sword?

Just what was that gray-haired woman and just what is Reinhardt?

She didn't think that Ellen was the strongest in the world, but she also didn't think that she would be so overwhelmingly beaten like that.

It was arrogant to think that she would be able to help them. After her overwhelming loss, Ellen couldn't continue to protest the woman's order to 'get out because she would just get in the way'.

After all that, she had no other choice but to realize the fact that she would really only get in the way of the gray-haired woman if she followed her.

She didn't know who that gray-haired woman was.

She had found out that there were even more things that she didn't know about Reinhardt.

'I… After all, I really know nothing about him.'

She wanted to know the things she didn't know about him, so she ended up hurting Reinhardt. She wanted to make it up to him somehow, so she wanted to save him.

She wanted to do something.

But she wasn't even able to do that.

Helplessness.

Ellen trudged through the rain, forced to feel such utter helplessness for the second time in her life.

* * *

"Don't tell anyone what you saw just now. You didn't see anything."

After Ellen and Harriet left, Loyar put a gag order on anyone about the fight that had happened.

A strange girl with a soulbound sword had appeared there.

"But that girl sure was no joke. Are all the people in Temple like that?"

Loyar frowned when she heard one of the gang members talk about it.

"Shut up. Don't even talk about this among yourself. I don't know what that girl was,

but she wasn't someone ordinary. If you talk about this, Temple or the Empire might do something against us."

To be exact, it was because Reinhardt decided to keep quiet about the girl for some reason. Loyar's words were absolute within the gang, so everyone just nodded.

The Rotary Gang's Number Two, Daibun, came forward.

"Big sis, what about Reinhardt…?"

Setting that fight aside, everyone was shocked by the information that Reinhardt had been kidnapped.

"I'll figure it out. You guys get ready to go back to work as soon as the rain stops. Though it doesn't look like it'll let up any time soon."

According to her prediction, Reinhardt should still be safe, but there was no time to delay.

"Are you going to be okay by yourself?" Daibun asked as if she was worried about Loyar going alone. Of course, Loyar just snorted to that.

"I kicked out that girl that actually managed to cut my hand like this, so do you think you'd be any more useful?"

Ellen had taken it as an overwhelming defeat, but Loyar evaluated her as a never-before-seen monster.

Of course, the other gang members weren't a match for Ellen.

"I'm leaving."

Loyar, covered in a robe, began to run into the rain.

* * *

As a result of their actions, although Ellen and Harriet were unable to find Reinhardt on their own, they played a decisive role in the search for Reinhardt.

It was already enough to inform Loyar, who had no idea that Reinhardt got

kidnapped.

“His Highness is…?”

“Yeah.”

Loyar usually didn’t get into contact with the others, but due to the nature of the situation, she had gone straight to the shopping street in the Al Ligar District and met up with Eleris.

Ellen and Harriet were still lacking in ability. To be honest, Loyar wouldn't have minded taking the two of them with her—assuming Eleris wouldn’t be involved.

If she went to rescue Reinhardt with the two of them, she would be unable to take Eleris with her. Of course, Eleris could do far more things at that point than Ellen and Harriet. It was hard to find something an Archmage wouldn’t be able to accomplish.

Eleris trembled slightly when she heard that Reinhardt had been kidnapped.

“How did that happen?”

“The amount of money the gang is earning now has grown exponentially and the complaints about us have also grown quite a bit, so we are trying to officially establish a base somewhere. During this heavy rain, everything we built up had been washed away. I thought we might as well move to the area we wanted to build our base altogether.”

Loyar crossed her arms and shook one of her legs. She seemed anxious.

“Incidentally, it seemed like His Highness came to see us directly to see if we were okay. He was worried, I guess. He thought he’d find us in the Wenster Market Street, so he wandered around that place… I think he got harassed by some guys over there. They probably ended up kidnapping him. Damn, what’s with this bad timing. Even if I had known in advance, there’s no way for our side to contact Temple…”

“So, who did it…?”

There was confusion and anger visible on Eleris’s face. It was only a guess that he got kidnapped, so she was already imagining the worst.

“I think it’s the Thieves’ Guild.”

"Why the Thieves’ Guild?”

Loyar didn’t share much about her organization’s internal matters, so Eleris had no idea what was going on within the Rotary Gang or its connections.

“I think they want to smash the gang apart. That’s also why I tried to avoid Wenster Market. That’s their turf. Perhaps they were waiting for us there because they didn’t manage to touch us directly—they were probably trying to figure out what they should do. But then His Highness, who they knew as our gang’s successor, basically ran into their arms. Of course, they had that much information.”

The connection was quite vague, but Loyar’s reasoning was pretty plausible.

Reinhardt entered the Market without knowing that he was actually stumbling into a tiger’s den.

If the gang and the Thieves’ Guild still had a friendly relationship, there wouldn’t have been a problem, but Reinhardt was completely unaware of how the situation had progressed.

Eleris got up from her seat, seeming as if she didn’t want to hear any more.

The flame of rage was flickering in her calm eyes.

“Where is the Thieves’ Guild’s headquarters?”

Intense anger was boiling inside Eleris’ eyes at that point as if she was about to destroy everything in her way. Loyar lightly tapped her shoulder in an attempt to calm her down.

“Calm down for a sec.”

“…His Highness is in danger, so we have to move quickly.”

“I mean, isn’t it kind of weird?”

“Weird? What is?”

Loyar felt like the whole situation was very suspicious.

“Right now, Wenster Market is teeming with Temple’s forces and Guards. That being said, they realized that His Highness had disappeared there. Then the Thieves’ Guild would, of course, be on the very top of their suspect list.”

Loyar knew that the Wenster district was the Thieves’ Guild’s turf, but if Temple’s forces and the Guards were also investigating that place, they should have the same information. Although Loyar didn’t know it, the Prince and Princess’ forces were also trying to find Reinhardt.

“They aren’t complete fools either. They should know that the Thieves’ Guild is pretty much the prime suspect. So why haven’t they found him yet?”

“You mean to say that the Thieves’ Guild might not be the culprit?”

“Hmm… I don’t know. Maybe the search party is only focused on Wenster Market and isn’t looking anywhere else.”

It was more than obvious that the Thieves’ Guild were the most likely to do something like this, so why hadn’t they found Reinhardt yet? Did that mean they weren’t the culprit?

That was what Loyar found suspicious.

“That’s fine. We’ll find out if we pay them a visit. Like that, we’ll find out if your guess is right or not.”

Eleris opened a map of the Imperial Capital on a table.

“Point where the Thieves’ Guild’s headquarters are,” she said with a sullen look on her face.

It seemed like she was about to teleport to the place and destroy everything she found there.

Things were going more than smoothly thanks to the information Ellen and Harriet gave to Loyar.

CHAPTER 132

The Thieves' Guild was, of course, well hidden. It wasn't an official group like the Merchant's Guild—they were just a group of criminals, so their main sphere of influence was in the back alleys of the Wenster Market, where countless branches of the Thieves' Guild were hidden under the complex maze of buildings.

"There are a lot of guards in Wenster Market, so they should have looked all over the place already. We don't have to go there."

"They try not to have something like a fixed headquarters. No matter how big their group is, the Guards could show up at any time and arrest all of them, so they try not to leave any traces."

Loyar pointed at some completely far-off spots that were not in the Wenster District.

"These guys change their headquarters periodically. Maybe that's why all the investigations have turned up no clue as to where the Thieves' Guild is located."

The fact that the Thieves' Guild didn't have fixed headquarters meant that they would have places that were easily exposed. In the Wenster Market, although it was their turf, they only had a few scattered bases there, not their headquarters—they were places they could easily abandon at any time.

"Do you know where they are?"

"Ah. Here, here, here, here…"

Loyar pointed at various spots on the map with her finger.

"…Isn't that too many?"

The places Loyar pointed at were scattered throughout the whole Imperial Capital, and there were about 20 spots as well. There were so many potential spots that she was afraid they'd run out of time if they went to every single one of them.

"Do you know what these locations have in common?" Loyar answered as if she

knew what Eleris would be thinking.

“That… I don’t know.”

"You know what the reservoir is?”

“Reservoir? What is that?”

"Uhm… It’s like a rainwater collection facility.”

Reservoirs were facilities that temporarily collected rainwater to prevent rivers from overflowing when it rained. They discharged the excess water when the water level of the river stabilized.

"It’s so huge that there’s no better place to use as a hiding place. It’s not a public facility, but if one paid off one or two officials who are managing that facility, it’s as easy as pie; they’re using these large underground reservoirs as their headquarters.”

"I don’t really get what it is, but… They use that facility as their headquarters, right?”

“Yeah.”

Loyar knew that they were changing their headquarters like that because she had once had a close connection with them. However, Eleris only tilted her head.

“Wait, but hasn’t it been a while since the rain really began to pour down?”

It was a rainwater collection facility, but because it had been raining for quite some time, the reservoirs should be pretty full already. Wouldn’t that mean that the Thieves’ Guild had lost their headquarters?

Loyar shook her head.

“No, if one closes the floodgates, rainwater won’t be able to get in.”

“Oh… Right.”

In fact, even if it rained, if they closed all the floodgates through which the rainwater flowed, those reservoirs wouldn’t be filled. That was how they prevented their headquarters from getting flooded.

“But if they closed all the floodgates of all the reservoirs, preventing them from functioning properly, it would be clearly obvious where they were. They only close the floodgates in the places where their headquarters are located at the moment and open them up again when they change places.”

“But it’s raining right now, right?”

“…So they can’t move their headquarters at the moment.”

The weak spot of this method was that they couldn’t move their headquarters while it rained. They wouldn’t be able to use an already full reservoir as their new headquarters, after all.

“We just have to find a reservoir with its floodgates completely closed; that should be the Thieves’ Guild’s headquarters.”

At Loyar’s words, Eleris’ expression turned strange.

“…Aren’t you supposed to be bad at using your head?”

“You punk, I’ve been doing things like this for a long time now, so don’t you think I’m getting better at things like this?!" Loyar shouted, conveying that if Eleris wanted to compliment her, then she should do it properly.

* * *

-Shaaaaaaaaaa…

It kept raining.

“Ellen, let’s go in now."

“I’m fine.”

Ellen sat on a bench in front of Royal Class’ dormitory staring forlornly into the distance.

As Ellen was sitting on that bench completely immobile, Harriet carefully grabbed her arm.

"That person was really strong. You couldn't help it either. Y-you fought really well."

From Harriet's point of view, Ellen still seemed to be brooding over her overwhelming defeat. She thought that Ellen fought well, however, and that she had shown off just how skilled she was.

She thought it wasn't something she should feel so depressed about. She was also wondering about that summoned sword, but she didn't dare ask. As if that summoned sword never existed, it had disappeared like a mirage as soon as the fight ended.

"You're going to catch a cold. Let's go in."

Ellen stared at her, hearing Harriet's words.

"It's… It's not because of that."

Water dripped down on Ellen's face from her hair.

Perhaps because of the water droplets, it seemed to Harriet as if Ellen had been crying.

"Let me stay like this for just a moment. It'll only take a moment… okay?"

What was difficult was that Ellen didn't even consider moving. The sun had already set, making way for the moon.

Why was she sitting in the rain in the middle of the night? What was she thinking?

"…Okay."

Harriet couldn't comfort Ellen.

She wondered if Reinhardt would be able to comfort her if he ever returned.

Harriet didn't know Ellen well.

However, she had a feeling that she'd become even more miserable if Reinhardt were to comfort Ellen.

Contrary to her words that she'd only be there for a little bit longer, Ellen only sat there staring into the rain for a very long while.

* * *

Harriet returned to the dormitory, leaving Ellen behind. Since it was Friday night, she could see everyone was spending their free time as they liked, as it was the last day of the week before the weekend. Even though she went out with an umbrella, it wasn't enough to stop the heavy rain. Hence, she looked like a wet mouse.

"Harriet! Where have you been? Why did you only come back now?"

"Uh, ah… Nowhere really."

"You have to be cold. Hurry up and come inside."

"Yes, thank you…"

Harriet only smiled weakly at Adelia's worried words. It was true that she felt cold, so she wanted to take a quick warm shower. As she was about to enter her own room, she saw someone raising their hand slightly from the opposite side.

"Where did you go?"

"Ah… Bertus."

Bertus approached Harriet with a polite, gentle smile.

"Did you go out to look for Reinhardt?"

"N-noo! W-why sh-should I?"

Bertus burst into laughter as if he found it very funny listening to Harriet trying to come up with excuses.

He was always gentle and likable ever since he just entered school. Of course, people were afraid of him because of his status outside of Temple.

However, at some point, Harriet started to feel a bit reluctant towards Bertus.

This uneasiness had its origin in her inability to tell what he was thinking, not only because of his status.

What was the difference between someone that smiled all the time and someone who was completely expressionless? That was what Harriet had started thinking those days every time she looked at Bertus.

She found him a bit creepy and scary, not only because of his identity.

“So, how was it? Did you find something out?”

She said that she didn’t go out to look for Reinhardt, but Bertus didn’t even bother calling out her excuses.

“…Not really.” Harriet answered in a crawling voice.

Bertus was still smiling as he nodded.

“It’s alright. Reinhardt is going to be back.”

Those didn’t sound like mere comforting words.

It sounded like he was talking about something that had already been confirmed. It sounded more like a prophecy, so Harriet raised her head.

“R-really?”

“Of course.”

As always. Bertus didn’t let any details slip.

* * *

Loyar and Eleris started to conduct their own desperate search. They had to check on quite the large number of reservoirs and see if the waterways around it were overflowing.

However, there was a problem.

"Damn it, it rained too much, I can’t tell if the waterways are overflowing because the

floodgates are closed or because the reservoirs are full."

Eleris nodded, hearing Loyar's anxious words. As it turned out, it was impossible to distinguish if the reservoirs had exceeded their limit on how much water they could hold or if their floodgates were closed because of the Thieves' Guild.

"I'll use Life Detection Magic."

Fortunately, Eleris had a solution for this problem. High-level Detection magic, such as Life Detection, couldn't be used by just anyone, but Eleris could be called an all-rounder wizard.

"Must be easy, livin' as a wizard."

Eleris laughed at Loyar's words.

"I've been reading books for hundreds of years, if I wasn't able to do this much, that would be rather weird."

Hearing those words, Loyar started staring at Eleris.

"…Just how old are you, by the way?"

"You beast, do you really think I'd give you an answer after you asked so rudely?"

"Are we talking about race now?"

"Then don't ask a lady for her age."

"What lady? A granny, that's what you are."

"What did you say, you brute?"

"What? A brute? Not a beast but a brute?"

"If I'm a granny, then you're a complete brute. After we find His Highness, you'll get an earful from me, so be prepared. This happened because of you not sharing information. His Highness came to me not long ago, and I told him everything was fine because you didn't tell me anything."

"…Fucking hell, how should I have known that this would happen?"

"Shut up. I'm almost done casting."

Eleris finished casting her spell while bickering with Loyar.

The Life Detection Magic was activated.

"They aren't in there."

Eleris gave a very simple answer and got ready to head towards the next destination.

"By the way, how did you hurt your hand?"

While they were moving, Eleris started to ask Loyar something. Loyar's right hand was wrapped in a bandage stained with blood.

"…I told you that two of Reinhardt's friends gave me this information, right?"

"You did."

"I tried to kick them out because they insisted on following us. One of them completely folded, she only trembled—she might have been a non-combatant. But the other girl remained persistent, so I handled her a bit rougher…"

Hearing Loyar's recount, Eleris seemed to get mad again.

"…Are you telling me that you got hurt while fighting with a kid?"

"She wasn't some ordinary brat, alright?!"

"Did you actually become nothing more than a wild dog because you keep calling yourself Irene's Wild Dog? Now you're even getting hurt while fighting little kids."

Eleris was asking her if her power actually regressed in a tone that didn't betray if she was seriously worried or teasing her.

"I don't know, damn it. They're raising monsters in Temple. I was able to overpower her this time, but in a few years, she'd be able to sack me even if I used my full power. That girl…"

When Eleris heard those words, her expression hardened.

She had thought she got hurt after getting careless while messing around with the kid, but Loyar had actually just said that she wouldn't be able to beat the girl even if she used her full power after the girl got older.

Eleris knew that Loyar wasn't the humble type. She wasn't one to say such things.

"What? It wasn't because you got careless?"

"I did go a bit easy on her, but… she had a strange sword."

"…Your opponent even used a sword? Against you?"

Eleris seemed astonished, wondering just what had happened. Loyar looked a little shaken as she walked through the rain.

"N-no… She hasn't used it since the start. Sigh. Seriously. I accidentally… No, it wasn't an accident. At that moment, I felt like that girl shouldn't be kept alive. So I got serious against her. Then that sword suddenly appeared in the girl's hand."

At first, Eleris was surprised that Loyar had wanted to kill one of her master's friends, and then she was surprised that a sword suddenly appeared in her opponent's hand.

"It was a soulbound sword. I don't know who she is, but she sure ain't ordinary, and that sword's not normal either. When I stopped it my hand ended up like this. Fuck, I don't think this'll heal quickly either."

Loyar shook her bandaged right hand.

"You… How could you try to kill such a wonderful kid…? Are you crazy? You're crazy, aren't you?"

You dared to try to kill a stranger who came to you just because you were slightly worried about His Highness?

That was what Eleris' blazing eyes were trying to convey. She was truly furious.

"Th-this isn't the time for that! We have to find His Highness now!"

“We’ll have a talk later.”

Eleris continued to step forward, full of anger. The way she was talking to Loyar seemed to convey that she should be prepared for what was waiting for her after they found Reinhardt.

‘A soulbound sword?’

She had only heard rumors that Temple was a place that nurtured monsters, but when Loyar came back, wounded in a fight against a child, Eleris started to believe those words.

“Anyway, don’t tell Sarkegaar. He would run off trying to kill her no matter what.”

“…Fuck, wouldn’t it be better to get rid of her? I still think that’s for the best.”

“Shush! If you ever let these words slip in front of him, you will die, I will die, and Sarkegaar will die as well!”

Of course, apart from that, her Lord’s friends were unconditionally precious to Eleris.

* * *

Saturday morning. It was about to dawn.

“It’s here.”

Eleris and Loyar couldn’t locate their headquarters before they arrived at the thirteenth reservoir, north of the Irene River.

Eleris was able to detect several vital reactions underground. Of course, it was impossible to identify specifically how many people were there and who they were because she could only feel their vitality.

“Okay, I’ll take it from here.”

Loyar, in her role as Irene’s Wild Dog, would retrieve Reinhardt. That was why she couldn’t ask the demonic spy wizard, Eleris, for help.

“Will you be alright on your own?”

“There are some dangerous ones among the guys of the Thieves’ Guild. If things don’t work out as planned, I’ll just transform and kill everyone.”

They were the Thieves’ Guild, a huge criminal organization. That was why they were wildly different from a gang that was just a small gathering of people. Hence there were quite a few dangerously talented individuals among them.

However, if she judged that her Master’s life was in danger, she wouldn’t continue to hide her identity. She first had to secure her Master’s safety after killing all of them, and then think about how to deal with the aftermath.

“It sure feels like you’re truly loyal, and yet you don’t.”

“Shut up.”

Eleris would continue to watch the situation after casting invisibility magic on herself and help Loyar if things got dangerous.

Loyar began to wander about to find the entrance to the reservoir leading to the basement. There had to be an entrance for people to get inside, not just waterways for water to get in, so she was looking for that.

Loyar started looking around impatiently.

* * *

“Teacher. So what you’re saying is…”

“Why did I turn into your teacher? I’m a great deal younger than you.”

“The-then how should I…”

“You’re telling me that you don’t know what my name is after saying it a fuck ton of times? Keep this up and I’ll make you lose everything here. Ya hear?”

“No, I know what you’re saying, but… If you suddenly tell me to hand over the whole organization like this…”

“Who said I wanted to take the whole place? D’ya guys have connections like me? Did I try to extort money out of you all?”

“Well… I’d rather give you money though…”

“Ah? That wouldn’t be fair, now would it? You’ve been pouring your blood and tears in all of this, so why would I covet that? You bastards don’t really get what I’m saying, huh?… I never said I’d crush this place or destroy you all, I just want to have a good time, ya hear me?”

“No, but…”

“But what? Wanna go till the end? You wanna try me?”

“N-no that’s what I meant…”

.

.

.

While this mysterious quarrel went on, suddenly some noise seeped in from one side of the reservoir, which was just supposed to be a huge empty hall.

-Bang!

-Who are you!

-Where’s Reinhardt, you punks? Imma kill you all!

-Bang! Boom! Clang!

The noise seemed to come from its edges rather than the center which was lit by orange lights. The expressions of the people sitting around the roundtable became rather strange all of a sudden.

“…What is going on?”

And among them, a boy was sitting in the most prominent seat, tilting his head.

Sometime after the fighting noises came to a halt, the assailant soon appeared in front of them, her face full of anger.

“…Reinhardt?”

The grinning Reinhardt, as well as a multitude of other people, were sitting around this round table.

"Big sis, aren’t you a bit late?”

From Loyar’s point of view, Looking at Reinhardt like that made it seem rather doubtful whether he actually got kidnapped.

CHAPTER 133

To sum things up, the day Reinhardt was taken to the Thieves' guilds headquarters on the day he was kidnaped. There, he got the opportunity to face all the key members of the guild.

Reinhardt hadn't done anything or even said anything.

He just stayed still.

'You crazy punk!'

-Punch! Punch! Punch!

'Are you crazy? Don't you know what'll happen if you kidnap a Temple student?'

'But… M-master!"

'You complete idiot! What's with your head? Do you want to blow up this place to catch a single rat?!"

-Punch!

The guy who said that he finally found a way to catch Irene's Wild Dog and had brought Reinhardt to that place while feeling triumphant was only rewarded by getting beaten half to death.

The Thieves' Guild Master was a surprisingly smart person.

The guy that wanted to take advantage of Reinhardt seemed to be the head of a branch, but in the end, he was just a small fry; he was so stupid that he couldn't even figure out what kind of consequences kidnapping a Temple student would have.

However, the Guild Master realized as soon as he saw what was going on. His subordinate was much too short-sighted. He had captured this man called Reinhardt, who was said to be the successor of the Rotary Gang, and had planned on using him as bait to kill off Irene's Wild Dog, who had been a huge thorn in their side.

But that was actually like burning a house down to remove a wasp's net.

The Thieves' Guild's headquarters was thrown into chaos because of what that crazy idiot did.

'What should we do…?'

'Let's get rid of him.'

'Shit, the place he disappeared at is also our turf. Their attention will definitely be on us.'

'But what else are we supposed to do in this situation… '

'Hey, you bastard! Take everyone that was around there at the time and torture them! Only a few people saw it, but one of them will definitely sing!'

If Reinhardt got kidnapped in a more neutral place, things would have been different.

However, the place he had disappeared from was the Wenster Market, the Thieves' Guild's turf.

Just by knowing where he got kidnapped, anyone who was aware of the conflict between the two organizations could easily infer that the Thieves' Guild was the culprit.

Silencing everyone involved was their best option, but it was only natural that the incident would get traced back to the Thieves' Guild.

Although they could put a gag order on the members of the organization, there were already too many people who had witnessed it. The Thieves' Guild was too large for them to shut everyone up all at once.

They were still a criminal organization. If their members were to be interrogated and tortured, this fact would definitely come to light someday. The Guild Master was close to a heart attack because of this incident one of the lower level members caused.

In the end, the Guild Master did whatever he could.

He freed Reinhardt. He didn't completely release him, but he freed him from his bindings.

He did it to avoid the accusation that they had treated him harshly later on.

'Hey, buddy. I'm really sorry. One of our members made a mistake… Okay? Understand? You saw it earlier, right? How I… Erm… scolded him?'

'Oh, well, mistakes happen. I get the situation.'

The Guild Master's lips spread into a wide smile; Reinhardt was very calm as if he knew things would happen the way they did.

'Could you return my belongings to me first?'

'Huh? Ah. Of course! Idiot! Where's his stuff?'

The Guild Master was acting extremely favorably to Reinhardt. He wanted to get rid of him as fast as he could, but he knew that if he got rid of him immediately, things would only grow bigger, so he was cautious of even touching even a hair on his body.

After Reinhardt got back his belongings, including the Fire of Tuesday, he stretched his body and slowly loosened his stiff muscles.

'What are you going to do about this? Are you going to dispel it, or…?'

Reinhardt handed over his student ID to the Guild Master.

'…This?'

'There's tracking magic on this, you know? If you keep this, they'll find me as soon as they realize I'm gone.'

'Wha-what…?'

"It's still the weekend, so they wouldn't have started searching for me yet. They would realize that I'm gone by Monday; that's when Temple will start looking for me.'

It was still Friday, so even if Reinhardt didn't return, they would just wonder where he went over the weekend.

The problems would start on Monday.

'Huh? E-erm… I see.'

The Guild Master only nodded blankly at Reinhardt's words. The situation had turned into a bizarre one in which the kidnapped person was actually helping his kidnappers.

'E-excuse me… Reinhardt? Why are you telling me that…?'

The Guards would rush into the place and rescue him if he just stood still and did nothing, so why was he doing this?

The Guild Master couldn't even begin to imagine what the intentions behind that strange boy's, Reinhardt's, actions were.

'We all just try to make a living. Do you think I really need to burn all the people here just to get by?'

His words seemed well-intentioned, but his smile was absurdly evil, so the Guild Master felt slightly numb.

* * *

The Guild Master couldn't release me that easily. If I went to the Guards and told them that I was kidnapped by the Thieves' Guild, that would be the end for them.

And if they were to kill me, the Thieves' Guild—which was a big group—would still get interrogated, so they were bound to get discovered.

In other words, the whole organization was facing annihilation because of the crazy actions of a single member, and they couldn't even do anything about it.

As they couldn't release me or silence me, I ended up receiving a fairly hospitable treatment in the Thieves' Guild. I couldn't go out, but they didn't threaten or torture me. I didn't really know how things might turn out, though.

Even when the search started, the Guild hadn't come to an answer.

'They started searching the Wenster Market. They're combing through the whole

place.'

They just continued to stay silent. In times like that, there was a certain thing called precise timing.

As I spent my days in that not-quiet-captivity, it became Wednesday.

'Reinhardt… '

'Yes, what?'

'Just… who are you…?'

The Guild Master stood before me, his face completely pale.

'Why… Are the Prince and Princess looking for you?'

'Ah… '

I laughed.

'Because they are my friends.'

At that point, the Guild Master seemed to seriously contemplate just committing suicide.

* * *

Wednesday evening was the perfect timing for what I wanted to do.

'Hmm.'

A group of people had entered the Thieves' Guild's headquarters. The guild members were so nervous that they couldn't even open their mouths properly.

The Guild Master was the same.

Only the group of people that arrived there and witnessed the whole place with everyone frozen in shock were calm.

All of them were wearing swords on their waist. Their clothes were plain, but just by looking at them, one could tell that they were either knights or something equivalent.

They weren't wearing uniforms of gauntlets or something, but they definitely were the Knights of Duke Salerian.

They immediately found me as soon as they started looking for me.

They had quickly found out that the culprit behind everything was the Thieves' Guild; they even found out where their headquarters were.

Their efficiency sure was terrifying.

'So, you aren't going back yet?'

'Yeah.'

'Weren't you kidnapped?'

'It's true that I got kidnapped, but… '

'These people are just the scum of society. Is there really a need to keep them alive?'

They asked me if it would be okay if they killed everyone there. Their attitude showed that they could just kill them regardless of the law since those people lived outside the law, after all.

Duke Salerian's Knights in front of me were much crueler than the Thieves' Guild's guys.

They were talking about killing someone as if it was just a chore.

How did I even manage to survive their pursuit back when I was escaping from the Demon King's Castle?

'Even pests have their own use… Don't you think so? If you tell these words to His Majesty the Prince… He'll know what I mean.'

'…Hmm. Okay.'

‘Can you keep my status as ‘missing’?’

“…It seems like you’re planning something. Understood.’

The knight, who appeared to be the group's commander, looked at me and then turned away.

‘We’ll go back.'

Bertus had confirmed that I was there.

After a slight delay, the personnel I believed to have been sent by Charlotte also arrived at that place—I said the same things to them as I had to Bertus’s people and sent them back.

Although the Guards and Temple’s forces weren’t able to find me, Charlotte and Bertus managed to find me right away.

Both of their factions had so much information that the public authorities couldn’t be compared to them anymore.

Both of them were intensely terrifying.

The Thieves’ Guild thought that they were moving about sneakily, but, in fact, there were many people who knew what they were up to—they were just dancing on someone else’s palm.

If Bertus and Charlotte understood what I was trying to tell them, then the Guards and Temple’s forces would only pretend that they were still looking. They should be able to guess what I was trying to do.

All the powers trying to trace me would only keep up the image of looking for me.

With that, everything had been laid out as I wanted it to be.

* * *

Even if I confidently walked out of their front door after Wednesday, those guys wouldn’t be able to stop me, but I didn’t do that.

The Thieves' Guild had already been discovered by Bertus' and Charlotte's forces, and I asked them to leave for the moment and keep my status as 'missing' because I had some business with those guys.

The Thieves' Guild had already turned into an organization whose fate could be determined by a single word of mine. They couldn't even silence me anymore because people had already discovered my whereabouts.

Since then, I'd become the sole decider over those peoples' life and death.

I somewhat expected Loyar's arrival as well. Of course, it was a lot later than I expected. I explained the situation to her when she swung by and told her to step down for the moment, but she insisted on staying with me to see how things were getting organized.

"…Hah."

Loyar was stunned when she heard my explanation.

"Weren't you afraid?"

How could you even think of something like that in your situation

Loyar seemed slightly angry.

"I somewhat knew that things would turn out this way even if I stayed still."

The Thieves' Guild didn't really have anything to do with me at the start. Everything had only happened because I wandered around over there. The moment I got captured, I had thought that I had really been on the losing end of things, but—after I organized my thoughts—I realized that it was also an opportunity in a way.

Additionally, ever since I got the Flame of Tuesday back, I was rather confident that I would be able to run away if things went wrong, so I moved forward rather aggressively.

This obviously was quite the risky venture, but it still was a venture worth its risk.

Ever since the forces of the Prince and Princess had come visiting that place, it had practically turned into a mourning house. Was this what one called cutting off one's

nose to spite one's face?

The entire organization was facing destruction because they tried dealing with a single unruly subordinated organization.

Loyar thought that I got kidnapped and rushed to where I was, but she seemed to have difficulties understanding how I managed to place the whole guild under my feet.

Yeah.

That was what power could do.

I thought that it was quite wise using others' power as my own.

Do you even know who I am?

Do you know who I know? I'll tell your mom everything you did to me!

It was basically just an extension of that.

It sure was good to have such great friends.

"Well… Since you're here, let's just wrap this up, now shall we?"

The Thieves' Guild executive seemed to find it difficult to accept that everything was about to get handed over to the Rotary Gang, who had been just a lowly subordinated organization before, especially the Guild Master.

"I'm just going to pretend that I have nothing to do with the Thieves' Guild after this is over with. Instead, how about we'll make big sis the next Guild Master?"

"Wha… What?!"

The one most shocked about hearing that wasn't the Guild Master but Loyar.

"Hey! No! I can't!"

'Hey, you punk,' I thought to myself.

‘Is it so hard to just eat the meal I worked so hard to serve you?’

CHAPTER 134

Damn it.

After laying everything out so neatly, it all got swept aside by someone I hadn't expected.

Loyar strongly objected to it, saying she'd rather die, so the Thieves' Guild executives had a rather strange expression on their faces.

They seemed conflicted about whether they should feel relieved about it or not. Although she could articulate it properly, Loyar was looking at me as if I was asking to get killed; in the end, I had no other choice but to retract that remark.

After some arguing, I eventually left the headquarters, telling the guys from the Thieves' Guild they only managed to survive because I decided to bury the case.

'Well, this is also fate, so let's get to know each other well in the future.'

'Y-ye… Yes.'

'Ah, people can make mistakes. Why are you all so stiff? Let's get along well in the future. Good, good. Let's not fight.'

'Understood… Thank you… Honestly, we don't know what would have happened… Really.'

At my casual words, the Guild Master looked as if his soul had just left his body. Anyway, it was true that I had prevented the Thieves' Guild from getting destroyed, even if I had only sat still.

I definitely felt the sincerity in the executives' words. Although she already showed her strict ambition, it seemed like they were also rather grateful to Loyar for refusing to take the seat of the Guild Master.

Not everything went as intended, but it still ended well.

Even though I had been released from my captivity, I still felt a bit dissatisfied.

After we left the headquarters, we went to a place with no people, then I complained to Loyar.

“Fucking hell, why can’t you just eat the meal I set before you?”

“Your Highness… I’m already exhausted from controlling about 200 kids, so how could I manage to take control of a large organization like the Thieves’ Guild all on my own? I can’t even count how many members that thing has.”

"Your Highness… I’m glad you're okay… But this is really going beyond my imagination.”

“…Eleris? You were there?”

“Yes.”

Eleris looked a little angry, as if she was wondering why she even bothered worrying about me.

Take responsibility for making me worried!

That was what her face seemed to convey. It seemed like she had watched everything with invisibility magic cast on her.

“It’s already hard enough to keep my body hidden every full moon; being the Guild Master is just too much.”

Loyar said that things wouldn’t last long if she were to take control, which made sense.

“Tch, and here I was happy that a free meal just fell from the sky.”

No matter how much I thought about it, it was such a waste.

Still, I managed to stop the Thieves’ Guild from touching the Rotary Gang, so I couldn’t say I hadn’t gained anything.

It was also clear that I could exert some influence on the Thieves’ Guild.

“By the way, what excuse are you planning on giving Temple?”

I wouldn’t say something like the Thieves’ Guild kidnapped me, but what other excuse would I give them for my five-day absence? That I went on a long trip to find myself? Seriously, what should I tell them?

“…First you’re talking about what you should do with the Thieves’ Guild and the next moment you worry about very typical things for a student… I really don’t know anymore.”

Eleris seemed to feel confused about how I could worry about things a student would never even think about and then suddenly worry about very typical things.

Loyar and Eleris asked me to explain from the beginning what happened, so I tried my best to add more detail.

Both Eleris’ and Loyar’s faces stiffened as they listened to me.

“Your Highness, you have to keep in mind that you could get into serious trouble.”

“…Would it kill you to not act on your temper?”

Of course, both of them nagged me.

“…I know, I was really fortunate that it was the Thieves’ Guild that caught me.”

If the ones who kidnapped me weren’t from the Thieves’ Guild, things would have been a whole lot more dangerous. In the end, I managed to overcome the situation in my own way, but if I had touched some other gangsters instead, I could have really died.

The situation worked out well for me in the end, but if one looked at the whole picture, I had gotten really close to dying there.

The consequences of my carelessness weren’t bad, but that didn’t change the fact that I had been acting really carelessly.

"Sorry."

In the end, I had no other choice but to sincerely apologize to the two of them who

went all the way there because they were worried about me.

* * *

After that, I heard about what had gone on while I was stuck from Loyar and Eleris. Only then did I find out why the Rotary Gang was nowhere to be found in the Wenster Market.

It was quite unexpected.

I then entered the Guard Post in the Wenster District, identified myself, and gave my statement.

I said that I got kidnapped by an unknown group. They seemed to have kidnapped me to get a ransom for me, but they abandoned me somewhere and disappeared when the situation got more serious.

I told them I didn't know who they were because they covered my eyes. I didn't even know where I was held. I just ran away after I got released.

Since I was officially missing, I figured that would resolve things.

Charlotte and Bertus had confirmed that I was safe, but the Guards and Temple's forces probably didn't know.

I spent the rest of Saturday giving them my fabricated statement. In the end, I just repeatedly said that I didn't know anything; the investigators didn't know whether they should believe me or not, but they didn't bother me anymore after that.

After checking that I was alright and securing my statement, they brought me to the front gates of Temple.

-Shaaaaa…

"Great job, kid. From now on, don't go to dangerous places anymore, okay?"

"Yes, thank you."

They held me up all day, so it was already close to the evening when I reached Temple, I would have to go inside and talk to the teachers again, which meant I

would have to give out another round of fake statements.

I got on the tram and arrived in front of the Royal Class dormitory.

Wearing the clothes the guard had given me and an umbrella, I tried to enter the dormitory.

-*Shaaaa…*

I wondered when the stupid rain would finally stop.

The Thieves' Guild didn't turn out to be that dangerous to me. Although making Loyar the new Guild Master eventually failed, things somehow worked out, and I managed to establish a connection to them.

That should be rather good. As Bertus said, I somehow created the starting line for something kind of cringe like becoming the "King of the Underworld".

Still, my heart felt heavy.

"…Hey."

"…?"

I didn't know how long I had been doing it, but I was looking directly into the eyes of Ellen Artorius, who was sitting on a bench in the rain.

"Rein… hardt?"

She stood up and staggered towards me.

I had heard that she got beaten up by Loyar.

I didn't know why she was sitting in the rain.

But I thought I knew what was going on.

Ellen was about to distance herself from me, but that girl actually went out to find me when I disappeared.

I didn't know what she was thinking specifically or for what reason she put so much effort into finding me.

However, while searching, she met Loyar and got beaten by her when trying to interfere. She even summoned the divine sword Lament but still lost.

I had no idea what Ellen was feeling at that moment.

She tried to look for me but ended up getting kicked out because she would be in the way; she had even gotten beaten up. She stood there looking at me with unfocused eyes.

"…Sorry."

I tried to find some words to tell her, but that was all I could say in the end.

Losing to Loyar must have been devastating, and she must have wondered just who on earth that person who could defeat her so easily was.

She must have realized that I had even more secrets than she thought.

"My secrets…"

"No."

Ellen interjected when I was trying to say something.

"It's okay."

The corners of her pale blue lips trembled slightly.

"I'm not… curious about that anymore."

What kind of emotion were those lips trying to convey? It was probably a smile.

She seemed happy.

She trembled and then suddenly hugged me tightly.

-Shaaaaaaa…

“You don’t have to tell me.”

Her voice and body trembled. She felt so cold to the touch. She buried her face in the nape of my neck.

Close to her eyes, I felt something hot flowing down.

They seemed to be tears.

That sensation forced me to freeze up.

Ellen was crying…

Because of me.

“I-it’s okay… it’s enough. It’s enough that you’re… fine.”

It seemed that she had forgiven me, but my guilt only grew.

* * *

Like that, the commotion came to pass.

The news that I was found had already been reported to the teachers, and I gave my statement separately to the teachers who were looking for me even though it was the weekend.

Mr. Epinhauser seemed to be absent.

The statement I gave the teachers wasn’t much different from what I gave the Guards. Alas, it also took the same amount of time.

The news spread that I had returned, so countless people were waiting for me there when I came back to the dormitory.

“Junior! Are you alright?”

“Yeah… I didn’t get hurt.”

“I-I was… I was so worried… Huk… Sobsob!”

Adriana hugged me and cried loudly. She wasn't able to go looking for me personally, but she seemed to have spent some sleepless nights because of me. Not only Olivia but all the other members of Grace also flocked to me and asked how I was feeling.

"I'm so relieved, Reinhardt…"

Olivia was also tearing up. Grace's club members wanted to go look for me on their own, but it seemed like the teachers had stopped them.

"…You're the worst person I've ever known."

"Is that a compliment?"

"Yeah, in a way, it is."

Charlotte, who knew my circumstances, just shook her head as if she was tired of it all.

"Let's talk more about this later."

Bertus was smiling at me as well.

Neither of them seemed to have been worried, as they knew what I had been up to.

Those two had played a big role in my survival.

Then, Ludwig and Delphin, as well as some classmates of theirs I wasn't familiar with, came up to me to greet me.

I thought my school life was completely ruined, but it seemed like I was actually doing better than most.

People around me kept telling me that they were worried about me and that it was good that I was safe until deep into the night.

Actually, I was never in any real danger to begin with. I wondered if they would kill me if I told them that I kept putting off my release by threatening my kidnappers.

I was very grateful for their sentiments, but my guilty conscience grew bigger and bigger.

Everyone left one by one as the night grew longer, and—after I was finally released—I let out a sigh of relief.

I had met up with Ellen first, and she had cried for some time, but it seemed that she had gone to her room.

I was able to greet everyone, but there was just one person I didn't see anywhere.

-*Knock, knock*

I knocked on her door.

-*Knock, knock*

Was she sleeping?

I didn't think she would be asleep yet, though.

After I waited for a little while, the door opened slowly. She didn't show me her face; I could only hear her voice.

-Can… Can we… talk tomorrow?

Listening to her voice, I understood why she didn't come to see me.

"…Sure, let's do that."

– Okay…

She probably cried a lot, so her voice was hoarse. The condition of her face wouldn't be any better.

Still, she went to such lengths to find me, so I wanted to at least talk to her a bit.

Well, it couldn't be helped; I would have to wait.

"I'll be on my way then…"

-W-wait.

But—in the end—she opened her door, grabbed my arm, and pulled me in.

-Katshak

She closed the door behind me. She had her head bowed down, not wanting to show her face to me.

"I heard that you went looking for me."

“…Yes.”

"Thank you. I’m sorry."

“…”

She suddenly hugged me without saying a single word.

"Sob, sob! Hick! sob! I-I… I was so worried… Hick!”

“…”

“Hick! Waah! Sob!”

Harriet cried until she couldn’t breathe anymore. I reciprocated her hug and patted her back.

‘Fucking hell,’ I thought to myself.

‘I should have come back earlier.’

Harriet cried for almost an hour, perhaps because she was just that worried.

I was about to go back to my room after comforting her, but then, with her head still bowed, Harriet asked me a question.

“Were you not scared…?”

“…I was scared.”

Before Wednesday, although I had been acting curt and casual, it was actually pretty

terrifying.

I could have died at any time depending on the Guild Master's whims. I might have landed myself in a situation in which I would have had to use the Flame of Tuesday, my supernatural power, and all my achievement points.

And I still could have died even if I had used all of that.

Of course, I would have had to kill those people.

Although my thoughts were slightly different from normal kids', I was actually kind of scared.

"Then it's even weirder."

"What is?"

"You should be crying… You must have been really scared…"

I was the one who should cry after going through something like that. I should cry in relief and have others comfort me.

However, there I was comforting others who were crying out of relief after finding out that I had come back safely, just like how I did for Harriet.

"You're… Weird."

Harriet seemed to feel that I was acting strange.

"It's because I'm an adult."

"…"

Harriet didn't respond to my condescending attitude.

"Yeah… That's right…"

I had no choice but to feel slightly embarrassed, as that answer wasn't what I had been expecting at all.

CHAPTER 135

The day after I came back, on Sunday, I didn't see Ellen in the dining hall during breakfast.

I somewhat knew what was going on. After talking to Harriet for a bit, I got a feeling for what it could have been about.

'I was just following her around… She suffered a lot. It's just, see… I don't know if I should say this… She got into a fight… with your boss… '

I had heard something along those lines.

'After we returned to Temple, she just kept on sitting on that bench in the middle of the rain, waiting for you… She wouldn't even listen to me… '

Maybe she did that because she wanted to be the first to see me when I came back; or maybe she was just out of her mind, I wasn't really sure.

Anyway.

She probably caught a cold.

-Knock, knock

I went to Ellen's room and knocked on her door. After waiting for some time, Ellen opened the door, looking quite messy.

"…What?"

She didn't even seem to have the energy to talk properly.

"If you're sick, you should go visit the priest on duty, what are you doing here?"

I didn't know if it was just a slight cold, but was it right to just keep it in while one was so sick?

“I’m fine…”

Ellen was trying to close the door as if she was saying that I should leave if that was all.

“…I knew you were going to say that, so I made you porridge.”

Sigh.

I felt quite sorry for a lot of things, so I planned on doing whatever I could for her.

* * *

“I’m glad you didn’t wind up dead.”

“…”

She was lying down and eating the porridge I brought her. I never thought I’d live to the day I would witness something like that—the day that someone caught a summer cold that not even dogs would catch.

“Why were you sitting around in the rain?”

Just because she was sitting in the rain like that didn’t mean I would come back faster. Ellen had sat in the rain for almost a whole day.

“I… I thought this was all my fault.”

That was what she muttered, avoiding my gaze. Why did she feel like it was her fault that I got kidnapped? There was no reason for her to think that way.

“I told you those things, so I felt like this was my fault.”

Ellen knew best that this was utter nonsense, but that was how she felt. After making a few mental leaps, it seemed like this happened because of what she said.

“I wanted to do something, but in the end, there was nothing I could do.”

“So… Because I felt so pathetic. Because I couldn’t bear it…”

Ellen closed her eyes.

“If I didn’t do that… I wouldn’t have been able to go on.”

She hated herself for not being able to do anything, so she had been torturing herself.

“I don’t hate that you have secrets.”

Ellen looked at me. Her eyes were red.

“I hate to helplessly lose someone precious to me. That’s what I hate… Being unable to do a single thing… I absolutely hate that.”

When she had found out that her brother had left to participate in the Demon World War, Ellen couldn’t do anything about it.

When I had gone missing and she had come looking for me, she had no other choice but to leave it in someone else’s hand.

At that time, Ellen seemed to have reflected on what she really hated.

Even without Loyar coming for me, I hadn’t been in any real danger. Although I hadn’t planned on getting kidnapped, at one point it had become a staged act.

In the end, it had been pretty meaningless for Ellen and Harriet to come looking for me to save me. It had no effect on me, and I had been completely safe.

But I couldn’t tell her that.

“I’m sorry.”

“…Don’t be.”

Ellen looked at me silently after I apologized.

“I’m more sorry.”

We stared at each other in silence for a while.

* * *

The kidnapping case had largely been settled and a tumultuous period came to an end after talking with Mr. Epinhauser privately on Sunday.

Mr. Epinhauser seemed rather sullen, seeming as if he didn't believe me, but he didn't ask anything more. Like Bertus, he was someone I couldn't read at all.

After my kidnapping, Class A underwent several changes.

"Ellen!"

" Yes."

* * *

"The rain has stopped. Should we eat out?"

"…Okay."

Harriet and Ellen became much closer. To be exact, it seemed like Harriet had become able to approach Ellen much more comfortably since they had gone out together to look for me.

Harriet, Adelia, and Ellen.

Those three ended up doing everything together. Naturally, the only girl that still went around on her own was Liana de Grantz.

Harriet felt that her being an outcast was a somewhat strange situation.

"Would… Would you like to come with us as well, Grantz?"

That was why Harriet tried inviting her as well.

"Sure."

After my kidnapping, the girls of Class A began to unite.

Harriet turned into the center point all the girls flocked to.

She evolved from a headstrong and stuck-up noble girl to the center of the girls. In

the original novel, she would have stayed the same until the end.

This made me wonder if all of them were changing.

There were more changes—another example.

"…"

"…"

After that incident, Ellen would slowly avoid my gaze when she looked at me.

I did the same.

However, it definitely felt different from before.

Before, she was just trying to pretend that she didn't know me; her behavior afterward was different.

It felt like she couldn't look at me properly.

It seemed like she did this either because she was embarrassed that she called me someone precious to her or because she showed her weakness in front of me by crying.

There were a lot of things for which I felt guilty towards her, and I felt really sorry, so I couldn't really approach her either.

I felt rather awkward because they started to care so much for each other.

I didn't know what the hell was going on, but it felt really weird!

As for the third change…

"…Good work."

"…Thanks."

Cliffman and I were on speaking terms.

“With her?”

“…It kinda feels like we made up but didn’t…”

Our conversations didn’t last long, just long enough to call them short conversations.

Didn’t it actually feel like we were flirting or something? We both cared about each other but were too shy to approach each other, something like that?

Anyway, it seemed like Ellen didn’t come to the gym because of a different reason than before. She could, of course, swing by, but it seemed like she didn’t have the time because she was hanging out with Harriet a lot.

It wasn’t like she was the one who asked to hang out first, but she did follow around Harriet, seeming as if she got dragged around.

Hence, the only regular visitors to the gym were Cliffman and me.

“…Would you like to spar?”

I wasn’t that good at wielding a sword, so when I asked him that question, Cliffman looked at me.

“…Yes.”

We two quiet men started practicing swordsmanship with each other.

* * *

I felt like I had gotten left behind, but the reversal of Class A’s atmosphere was straight-up ridiculous.

Ellen and I made up, but things turned kind of awkward, Harriet became Class A’s unrefuted center of attention, and I became friends with Cliffman after I only had female friends before.

A week after I got kidnapped, Thursday.

“The Thieves’ Guild is just the beginning?”

“Yes, but I haven’t really worked out a detailed plan yet. I got kidnapped so suddenly, after all.”

I talked to Bertus last. His goal was to absorb the Empire’s underworld and keep a firm grasp on it. However, he couldn’t possibly control everything on his own, so he tried to make me his proxy.

That was why I decided to take advantage of my kidnapping situation.

“I knew you were bold, but this is just amazing.”

Bertus grinned, asking me where I took that confidence from.

“Take care of it, although I can’t really help you. I can give you some advice, though.”

Bertus couldn’t have anything to do with the underworld. I had to keep in mind that if I got caught doing this dirty work, I would be the only one to suffer.

Of course, I hadn’t even absorbed the Thieves’ Guild yet, so there wasn’t much I could do at that stage.

* * *

Ellen didn’t go to the training room, but that didn’t mean she gave up on her training.

She just didn’t do it in the training room.

“…Why are you here again?”

Ellen had just arrived at the Rotary Gang’s new base located in the southern part of the Imperial Capital. Loyar seemed surprised to see Ellen appearing there so suddenly again.

“Teach me how to fight.”

“…What?”

What kind of nonsense is this?

That was what Loyar seemed to think, but Ellen shamelessly continued to approach

her.

“Teach me how to fight…”

"Why would I do that…”

“You’re good at fighting."

What kind of situation is this?

Loyar’s brain was about to freeze.

‘…You crushed her? You even tried to kill her?'

‘Tha-that’s… '

When she remembered the expression on her master’s face when he heard that she had beaten Ellen up, contemplated whether it would be better to kill her, and even tried to kill her, Loyar’s head felt numb.

‘Don’t do things you aren’t ordered to do.’

Her master didn’t even swear like usual; he just said those things. However, because of the anger these words carried, Loyar honestly felt like screaming because it was so scary that her head stopped working.

Was it because he was of the Archdemon bloodline?

Loyar realized at that point that she would have wound up dead if anything had happened to Ellen.

As a result, she didn’t want to have anything to do with that girl ever again, and yet that girl had approached her.

She was asking her to teach her how to fight out of nowhere.

“Hey, kid. There should be a whole lotta people much better and smarter than me in Temple, so why do you want to learn from me…?”

“Because you’re different from the teachers, auntie.”

Ellen clearly realized just how different real combat was from sparring and training in her brief clash with Loyar. She thought that the only person who could teach her was Loyar.

I want to learn how to fight better.

I want to get even a little stronger.

Hence, Ellen came to Loyar.

Of course, Loyar focused on something else entirely.

"…Auntie?"

Loyar's eyes flashed at the word 'Aunty'. Ellen just tilted her head.

"Yes, aunty."

"…"

Loyar was really angry.

"…Shouldn't you call me big sis?"

"If you teach me how to fight, I will."

Ellen drove it in as she prepared for round two.

"Auntie."

-*Pop!*

A vein grew prominent on Loyar's forehead.

"Okay, let's do this then, kid."

–*Swish*!

Loyar rushed at Ellen like lightning.

-Boom!

And Ellen took on Loyar's hit just like that.

* * *

With Ellen absent, I mainly practiced with Cliffman. His talent was 'Combat', a talent for everything having to do with fighting. It was a comprehensive talent just as great as Harriet's 'Magic'.

It went without saying that weapon handling was included in this. Even Ellen, who was like a walking talent vending machine, didn't have that talent.

Cliffman was also a monster similar to Ellen in the field of combat, so it was only natural that he was far superior to me.

Their styles were a bit different, though.

While Ellen had quickly subdued me with her sophisticated techniques, that guy fought almost like a beast.

-Kang! Kakang!

Although Ellen wasn't lacking in strength, she strived to reach the extremes of technique itself. She calculated every sword strike so that she couldn't help but win. It went without saying that she was excellent at improvising.

However, Cliffman's style was to push his opponent using his strength, reflexes, and animalistic intuition rather than technique.

It felt like his fighting instinct was forcing him to choose the most optimal path.

Ellen had to calculate the correct path first, but that guy just swung his sword in a way he felt would be best.

-Kang!

"Wahk… Woah…"

I staggered to get up.

When Ellen completed a match and subdued me, she would stop before making her last move and say, “You’re dead.”

If what Ellen did was subdue me, then what that guy did was overwhelm me.

His style was incomparable to Ellen’s.

“…Are you okay?"

"Ah, yeah."

After we were done fighting, that wild, boar-like man would grab my hand, help me up, and ask if I was seriously hurt. What was with that? Is that what one called gap-moe?

“I can’t control my power well… Sorry.”

“No, no. I’m just hella weak is all."

“…But you’ve improved a lot compared to the start of the semester. A lot.”

Ah.

Why were we being so sappy when it was just us two men there? Complimenting and praising each other like that…

Anyway, his technical skills were lacking, so he wasn’t good at controlling his strength; it was a lot harder than when I sparred with Ellen.

“…Let’s stop for today. It’s late.”

“Okay.”

It was already rather late, so I nodded to Cliffman’s words. I should just eat something and then go to sleep. When it got closer to curfew, I went towards my room but then saw someone wandering about.

The hallway was dark, and everyone should have been in their rooms, but I saw someone coming into the hallway from afar.

It was Ellen.

"…"

It looked like she had gone out somewhere because her whole body was covered in dust.

She wasn't just dusty either.

Her face was somewhat red, her head was a complete mess, and she seemed seriously injured, as she was limping. When she made eye contact with me, she lowered her gaze and tried to run past me.

Oh, come on, what's her problem?

A kid who usually wouldn't act that way suddenly acted strangely. It made me feel somewhat crazy.

That girl who'd say that she was going to do it her way no matter what other people said or thought, who didn't care much about other people, suddenly acted like that towards me.

I knew that she felt guilty and sorry towards me, but no matter how I thought about it, she had no reason to think that way. I thought she was doing it because she thought she had been too harsh on me.

No, it really was true that I had a lot of secrets; I felt really sorry that I couldn't tell her any of them, so why did she have to feel sorry?

And thus a vicious circle of guilt was created, to the point where I was about to go completely crazy.

"Hey."

"…Yes."

"How… did you get hurt like this?"

"It's nothing really."

Did she get into a fight? I usually would let it slide because things were still awkward between us, but seeing her like that, I just couldn't let it pass.

Even if she got beaten, she wasn't the type to get beaten up so badly, though, right?

"Well, it is what it is. Let's just go and get you some treatment."

"It's fine…"

"Fine? What's fine? Follow me."

I grabbed Ellen's arm.

"I-it hurts… B-be more careful…"

When I grabbed her arm and tried to drag her with me, Ellen staggered and almost fell.

I felt like I saw Ellen's weak side quite a bit over those past few days. I never knew I'd see Ellen in such a pathetic state like that.

Looking at her like that made my heart tremble, but more than that… I was worried about her.

If people changed too drastically suddenly, that meant they were about to die!

"Ah… Yeah. Okay."

Ellen followed behind me while limping.

-*Sting!*

"Urk!"

And, after I got beaten up by Cliffman all day, I wasn't in peak condition, either.

"…While we're there, I should probably also get myself treated…"

We went to see a priest while supporting each other.

CHAPTER 136

"... Did you two fight?"

"No."

Both of us were in a complete state of exhaustion, so the priest on duty's doubts were reasonable, but both of us just shook our heads. After having a recovery spell cast on me, I felt my condition improving quickly.

However, when I glanced over to Ellen while my wounds were recovering, I noticed her condition was much worse than mine.

Her arms and legs were covered in long sleeves of bruises, and one could only assume that there were more on her torso and lower body.

"She looks like she was in a fight; what did you do when you went outside?"

The priest looked over her body and asked her what she did to end up like that, but Ellen shook her head.

"The same as usual."

Ellen didn't say anything more, and then me and her, who had been cleaned up using recovery magic, left the infirmary and headed back to the dormitory.

"…I thought you went out to play. What did you do?"

I thought the four girls went out to play together, but Ellen seemed to have gone to a completely different place.

"I went to the auntie with gray hair."

"…What?"

A gray-haired auntie? What was she talking about?

"I asked her to teach me how to fight."

"…You. Are you talking about big sis?"

She and Harriet already knew about the Rotary Gang, so I had nothing to hide regarding them.

"…Yes."

Wait, she went back to Loyar? Even after she had beaten her up like that? I thought I knew what she was thinking. It was the first time she had ever lost so badly, so she was rather shocked.

Had it been so shocking for her to hear that she should fuck off because she would get in the way? Enough to ask the person who had tried to kill her to teach her how to fight?

"Hey… I know why you're doing this… You better stop."

"…"

I had given Loyar a firm warning to be careful, but she was the type of person that would lose reason if she got angry. I had seen her fight before.

"If she hits you in the wrong place, you might end up… you'll be dead before you know it. You have to choose your opponents more carefully."

I had no idea why Loyar agreed to fight with her, but Ellen's physical condition was obviously completely messed up. If Loyar ever made a mistake in controlling her strength, Ellen might die.

"I don't want to be like that ever again."

She didn't want to experience that feeling of being too weak to do anything—that helplessness was the reason Ellen had ended up sitting in the rain in such a daze.

She didn't want to feel that way again. Ellen held her hands still as we reached the lobby.

She didn't look at me and kept her head low.

“Reinhardt.”

“Huh… Yeah.”

She spoke as if she wanted to request something of me.

“Who are you? Who is that person? Why did she try to kill me? Why did she end up not killing me? Why did you lie again after you got released after you got kidnapped?… I won’t ask you to answer these things.”

Harriet and Ellen knew that my statement after being released was a complete lie. They just simply released me after they went through the trouble of kidnapping me, but I had no idea who they were—that was the false statement I had made when I got back.

However, both Ellen and Harriet knew that I got released after they went to find Loyar.

She said that she wouldn’t ask about Loyar’s or my affairs, so I shouldn’t be curious about her's.

“So I… I will continue to do this.”

Ellen wouldn’t be curious about anything having to do with me anymore. That was her answer to me asking her to not train with Loyar anymore.

This wasn't even something I had the power to decide over. Loyar was supposed to be my boss, after all.

However, I was actually Loyar’s superior, so I did have the right to decide over this.

Usually, one would think that Ellen was asking the wrong person, but she had actually asked the right person.

She wanted to get stronger. In my opinion, she was already strong enough, but she was actually quite enraged that she had met someone who was so much stronger than her.

It was a strange feeling.

Ellen was originally supposed to be a character that completely lacked any desire to win. She was simply good at anything she did, so she was someone who would always win, no matter if she aimed for it or didn't. She was just that talented.

However, Ellen had gotten involved with me and that incident, and eventually, she wanted to save me on her own but got completely overwhelmed by someone a lot stronger than her, so she could just sit by and watch. She despaired.

So a new feeling—a desire to get stronger—bloomed in Ellen.

"…Do what you want."

I would have to warn Loyar that she should be gentle.

"By the way…"

"…?"

"Don't you care about me anymore after you've made some new friends? I'm going nuts here."

"…Ah."

Ellen was a bit dazed after hearing what I said. Then she murmured softly, her eyes slightly lowered.

"…Sorry."

"…N-no. I didn't say that for you to tell me this."

I didn't want her to say sorry; I just wanted her to react like usual.

She was so conscious of me!

I thought it would take a lot more time for her mentality to normalize again.

* * *

Even if Ellen's condition was incredibly serious, she returned to full health immediately after getting recovery magic cast on her by the priest on duty.

Of course, she ate a lot more to prevent getting malnourished, as I had in the early stages of my training when I had very low physical strength.

After classes ended on Friday, I went to tell Loyar that she should go along with what Ellen wanted and be careful. Loyar expressed her displeasure about it. Nominally, she was my boss, so I was merely asking for a favor, but in the end, it was nothing short of an order.

“So, big sis, please take care of her.”

"Ah… This is difficult."

Loyar signaled something like, “I hate this! Why do I have to do this?!” with her eyes. Even though I didn’t do much, my eyes were telling her, “You better fucking do this, you bastard!”.

On the outside, I appeared to be very polite, but I was essentially ordering her to do it.

“…It’s not my fault if you end up breaking something because I couldn’t control my strength properly."

"Yes. That’s fine."

Ellen just bravely stepped forward and said that.

Loyar seemed to have thought that Ellen wouldn’t want to go through it anymore if she was a little harsh after she annoyed her so much; however, knowing her, she would probably be right back the next day and continue with the training until she is satisfied.

Ellen had quite the strong mentality as well.

Even if she ended up not doing it, Loyar really wanted to kill Ellen before, and Ellen knew that.

But she still casually went up to her and asked Loyar to teach her how to fight.

The gang members seemed interested in watching them fight, but Loyar didn’t want them to see, so she dragged Ellen to a deserted place.

The others seemed very disappointed by that.

I also went to look around the new gang base. The house was large enough to accommodate the entire gang, which had about 200 members.

The construction work was directed by Daibun, the gang's Number Two.

"…Will you be fine without any experts?"

I didn't think they hired any professionals. They were probably building it on their own, right?

"We've been to many places and experienced a lot of things, so don't you think that some of us built something like a house at least once?"

"Ah."

Since the backgrounds of most beggars were rather turbulent, some among them seemed to have worked in construction and architecture before. Daibun didn't seem like he was one of them, but he seemed to have experience supervising guys that had experience in those fields.

As there were many people, there were many different skill sets. It was truly fascinating.

"It's thanks to you, Reinhardt."

"I just said a few words."

"A few days ago, the Thieves' Guild gave us their full support to build an even bigger building."

"Oh, really?"

They seemed to have provided them a lot of funding to build a new gang base to save some face after receiving so much help from me while they were actually planning on getting rid of the Rotary Gang.

Even among criminal organizations, they still cared about things like face. For what I did for them, all their members should bow three times in my direction each day.

Still, if it actually came to a full-blown fight, someone might have died, but I was fortunate that I didn't have to see any blood after getting kidnapped.

I looked around the gang base's construction site a bit longer before heading to where Ellen and Loyar were training.

They had changed locations to a place in the southernmost part of the Imperial Capital, so there weren't many people there. If one walked a bit further, one would reach a forest.

Ellen rolled on the floor as if she got beaten quite badly by Loyar again, and then she rose to her feet.

"Can't you just use that sword?" she asked Ellen calmly.

"I won't use it… I can't summon it anymore."

Ellen threw one of the two training swords stuck in a tree close to her towards Loyar, and Loyar caught it. I was wondering why she took some training swords with her, but it seemed to be for this purpose.

"Hmm… Haven't held a sword in a long time."

After saying that, Loyar seemed to hold great skill in swordsmanship.

Of course, she still pushed forward with just her strength and reaction speed, but in the end, Ellen was still no match for Loyar.

Ellen tried to counter when their swords touched, tried to lead it, changed her center of gravity, and even staggered into different directions.

However, the moment she blocked Loyar's sword, her training sword received so much damage by the swing that it shattered. Loyar's swings were incredibly fast as well.

Ellen had no other choice but to evade, as her counters and blocks were totally impossible to achieve, then she messed up.

Their physiques were completely different.

Faced with such overwhelming differences in weight class, technique became absolutely meaningless. Ellen seemed shocked by that.

However, rather than despairing, she seemed to have realized what she needed to focus on more.

I didn't tell Loyar or Eleris about Ellen's true identity. I had just said that she was an extraordinary individual.

How would Loyar react if she knew that Ellen was the younger sister of Artorius, the warrior that killed the Demon King?

She'd say that we have to kill her, wouldn't she?

Anyway, I, the Demon Prince, was watching the Demon Realm's spy, a Lycanthrope, training the hero's younger sister.

* * *

After training all evening, Ellen and I ate together with all the gang members.

It wasn't really a proper meal, just some rice balls.

A sign to show that the gang's finances had improved was that they weren't just plain rice balls but actually had something similar to meat in them.

"Hey, little lady, you got hurt quite a bit. Are you okay?"

"You have quite the dirty temper, big sis."

"How could you beat her up like this?"

"Shut up, you punks! Should I have stood still, then?"

All the gang members had something to say as they watched Ellen munching away on the rice balls.

When she arrived, she seemed like such a sweet and pretty child, but now she was eating the rice balls, appearing even more like a beggar than the gang members, so they couldn't help but pity her.

Her hands were trembling while eating the rice balls. Ellen couldn't really put a handicap on herself. Loyar wasn't someone she could take on halfheartedly; if she wanted to get trained, she had to put up with this.

"…I'm fine."

Ellen, who blankly munched on her rice balls, staggered to get up.

"Urgh…"

-Woah! Waah!

Everyone was clamoring as they saw her staggering like that.

"Haah… Hey. You make me look like the bad guy here."

Loyar clicked her tongue as if Ellen annoyed her terribly.

"I'll come back later…"

"Don't."

"I'll be back."

I supported the staggering Ellen, accompanied by the gang members' obvious heckling.

-Reinhardt, you. You're also a man, huh?

-But he's probably weaker than that girl, right?

-Now that you mention it…

-If they were to get hitched, she'd have him under her thumb.

-She does seem to be an unusually strong-willed girl… Seeing her get up even after getting beat up so much by big sis.

"Fucking hell…"

It seemed like some weird misunderstanding was formed in the minds of the gang members.

“Are you okay?”

“Yes…”

Ellen didn’t even have the strength to walk on her own.

It was a very strange feeling, seeing Loyar overwhelm Ellen, whom I had never been able to defeat before. Of course, Loyar hinted that she wouldn’t be a match for her after a few years.

Although I knew that Eleris was very formidable, only then did I realize that Loyar was also incredibly strong.

Ellen passed out halfway through the walk back, so I had to carry her to Temple.

It seemed like I ended up doing some additional strength training that day.

CHAPTER 137

Ellen had suddenly decided to start training with Loyar, so I mostly only sparred with Cliffman. Although some quite strange events had occurred, I quickly returned to my daily life at Temple.

Like that, it became July.

-What are you going to do during the vacation?

-Shouldn't you worry about finals first?

Kono Lint was excited, as our vacations were fast approaching; Erich advised him to first think about the final exams.

What had I done for the finals to be already so close?

However, after our final exam, we would be given about a month of vacation.

During his first vacation, Ludwig would go to Delphin's hometown, Talprad, to train his ranged weapon mastery. They would encounter events like fighting bandits.

Class B's Ludwig, Delphin, and Lanian had already become close friends, as intended by the original story, so their vacation event should proceed without any problems unless Charlotte suddenly decided to do something with all the Class B kids.

And even if the ranger training didn't take place, it wouldn't be such a big deal. Of course, as Ludwig got trained as a ranger in the original story, he got used to things like mountainous terrain and developed his tracking and hunting skills.

I mean, there weren't many incidents connected to military matters at that point, the slice of life part, so it would only become serious if there was another big deviation from the original development.

I didn't really study for the final exam. Some challenges related to the final exam appeared, but they were really similar to the ones before. I had failed the first time, so I didn't think I would succeed that time either.

Instead of studying hard for nothing like last time, I planned on relaxing.

After all, I hadn't really studied to get good grades but to get achievement points.

I wondered what I should do for my vacation.

I had no intentions of simply playing around. I could just train as I usually did, but I could still go out of Temple for longer periods of time, so I could take some more advanced actions, things I wouldn't normally be able to do.

I was thinking about spending my vacations completely differently from what Kono Lint, who only wanted to play around, was planning.

It was Wednesday, and I had just returned to the dormitory after all of my classes were over.

"Hey, Reinhardt."

"Huh?"

I turned around when I heard someone calling out to me; there were the four girls from Class A. The one who called out to me was Liana de Grantz.

What did they want?

Liana indicated towards the window with her chin.

"We're going out to get some dessert. Wanna join us?"

"W-why are you inviting him!?"

The face of Harriet, who was with her, immediately turned red, perhaps because she didn't expect it. Of course, Liana, who was very my-pace, just shrugged her shoulders.

"Just because."

She really didn't seem to have a reason.

The instant she said that, Kono Lint and Erich, who were chatting about their

vacation plans, turned towards me.

Ah, I want to kill that fucking normie.

That was what their expressions conveyed. Ellen, who apparently wanted to hang out with me again after a long time, was also part of the group of girls. Adelia's expression showed uneasiness. She was still afraid of me.

Harriet's expression showed her obvious bewilderment at Liana suddenly pulling me into their plans.

Although Ellen and Harriet's attitudes towards me had changed a bit ever since the kidnapping incident, Harriet still had her unique aspects.

What should I do?

Hmm.

I felt the gazes of Erich and Kono Lint on me, emitting intense killing intent.

"If you're the ones buying."

"I was planning on treating the others anyway."

Hearing Liana's reply that she would pay for everyone as if it was natural, the faces of those two watching me distorted even more.

"Then I'll go with you."

I didn't really think much of it, so I just stood up from my seat to make those two even more upset.

"Th-that's! Then! Le-let's invite the others as well!" Harriet exclaimed, with her face slightly shriveled up. She probably simply didn't want to be around me alone.

Hearing that, the two bystanders' eyes lit up: *'Maybe they'll take me too?'*

"Are you guys also coming?"

Liana turned towards Erich and Kono Lint, who had been watching the whole

exchange from a distance, as if she didn't really care much.

The price for seven people's worth of desserts would be pretty high, but she was a Duke's daughter, so things were different.

"H-huh? U-us?"

"Tha-that's…"

When she directly asked those two if they wanted to come, their faces turned bright red, and they started stuttering.

In the short period of time Erich and Kono Lint spent just looking at each other without answering, Liana took the lead.

"Never mind. Let's go."

I felt sorry for those two, who couldn't even take a hint when it was being spoonfed to them.

If you continue to be like that, you'll stay single for the rest of your life, idiots.

That was what I tried to tell them with my eyes.

* * *

I had thought that Ellen and Liana's personalities were slightly similar, but after comparing them, I felt how hugely different they were.

Ellen was just the calm type.

And Liana was the cool type.

It was the subtle difference between calm and cool.

"…"

-Munch munch

Ellen rarely showed any reactions.

“This is delicious. There’s too much cream, though.”

Liana showed her reactions, but she was quite blunt and straightforward. There was definitely a difference between being calm and just being straightforward.

“Yeah! It’s so good! Try this, Adelia.”

And then there was Harriet, who had big reactions to everything.

That was especially true when I teased her, but she was someone who had her heart on her sleeves to begin with. In the past, she had seemed incredibly rude, but with time her personality made a complete change, almost evaporating that aspect of her.

It might have happened because I strengthened her immunity to those things.

“Isn’t it delicious? It’s delicious, right?”

“Mhm, it’s good…”

Adelia only expressed herself with a few words.

“Aren’t you eating anything?” Liana asked me, who hadn’t even touched his dessert yet.

“Reinhardt hates sweets.”

Ellen, who had stayed quiet up until then, as fitting her personality, suddenly said something. Come to think of it, she was around when I told Redina that I didn’t like sweets a long while ago; she seemed to have remembered that.

At that, all the girls turned towards Ellen.

Of course, Ellen was still eating her parfait even after she said that.

“Oh… You hate sweets?”

Harriet was curious because it was her first time hearing of it. I nodded at her words.

“It’s not like I absolutely hate them, but I don’t really like eating those things.”

Come to think of it, the only classmates who knew that about me were Ellen and Charlotte.

"…You came here knowing that we would eat sweets, though, right?"

Liana looked at me as if I were crazy.

"I didn't really come for the desserts, I only came because you are buying."

Liana clicked her tongue at the absurd statement that I had gone there even while not liking sweets just because I'd get free food.

"Hey, you should at least eat what you ordered."

Of course, I only ordered a piece of cake, but I couldn't even touch it. At Harriet's remark, I nodded towards Ellen.

"It doesn't really matter anyway because she'd eat everything regardless."

-Munch, munch, munch

If there were leftovers, they would get absorbed into that girl's stomach anyway, so it didn't really matter that much.

Ellen, who was treated like a leftover disposal unit, was still eating her own food without even paying any attention to us. The girls' faces showed a bizarre expression again at my words.

Ellen ate a lot. They knew that by then.

Those guys are pretty close, aren't they?

That was what their expression seemed to mean.

Of course, even though I didn't eat anything, I still drank my tea. Liana looked at me with her eyebrows slightly furrowed.

"You shouldn't say such weird things. It sure makes me wonder how one could become as twisted as you."

“You just have to try really hard."

“Pfffft!”

Adelia, who was drinking some iced tea, spat out her drink after hearing my absurd words.

“A-ah… I-I… I’m s-sorry!”

Fortunately, she didn’t hit anyone with that, but she still cleaned up what she spilled with a tissue. She laughed at what I said, so she was scared that I would get angry. Even her ears turned bright red because she felt so embarrassed.

“B-but I sure am jealous of Ellen… She eats so much but doesn’t gain any weight.”

Adelia tried to subtly change the subject to divert attention from her.

“Adelia, if you train your body all day like her, you wouldn’t gain any weight either, you know?”

At Liana’s words, Adelia’s face darkened.

“B-but Ellen has a combat talents… I’m majoring in magic…”

Adelia wanted to eat desserts just as wildly as Ellen did, but she seemed hesitant because she worried that she would fall into the hell of irreversible weight gain. She actually looked at Ellen, who could eat everything she wanted, with envy.

-Munch munch munch

Seriously now.

It really was pretty annoying seeing such a thin person doing that in front of others. Why did she have to eat as if she had nothing when she had basically everything?

It was driving me mad as well, that punk!

I usually wouldn’t feel ashamed of things, but I felt really ashamed when I was out eating with her.

There were times when I wanted to slap the back of her head to make her stop shoving food in, but one didn't touch a dog while it's eating, right? So I held it in.

…I held it in because I might actually die if I had really slapped her.

"Anyway, where are you guys going during the vacation?"

Everyone began to ponder after hearing Harriet's question.

"Hmm… I think I'll stay in Temple."

It seemed like Adelia wanted to stay in Temple. It wasn't impossible for us to just stay in Temple during our vacation. Since we were part of Royal Class, we would receive full support, even during our vacation.

At Adelia's words, Harriet tilted her head.

"Why? Don't you want to go home after such a long time?"

Adelia's face turned red at Harriet's words.

She seemed a little embarrassed.

"…I can't do any magic research at home."

"Why can't you research ma… A-ah. S-sorry… R-right…"

Harriet mumbled without thinking properly and then quickly apologized, realizing her mistake.

Adelia was a commoner, and Harriet was the young lady of the Saint-Owan Duchy.

It was impossible for commoners to have facilities to research magic in their homes. Harriet couldn't even imagine a life without such things—she just took it for granted.

In Temple, they were friends, but they wouldn't even be able to make proper eye contact anymore once they graduated. Both Adelia and Harriet had remembered it at that moment.

Adelia blushed out of embarrassment, and Harriet blushed because she thought that

she hurt her friend with the words she unwittingly uttered.

Temple was a place where people who would never have met on the outside could easily meet and become friends.

Temple was the only place in the whole continent where I, a beggar, and Adelia, a commoner, could talk about our vacation plans with the daughter of a Duke.

Anyway, it seemed like Adelia would be staying there for the entirety of the vacation to use the magic research facilities.

“But isn’t it better to take a little break from that, though? Do you just want to continue studying for your whole vacation?”

At Liana’s question, Adelia just shook her head.

“Uhm, I… I don’t have that much time to master my magic crafting to get my enchanter’s license before graduation.”

“Enchanter’s license?”

As far as I knew, her talents were summoning magic and magic crafting, right? She was trying to learn enchanting instead of summoning magic?

Why was she trying to study something other than her own talents?

And what was that about a license?

My question made Adelia’s face turn even redder as if she didn’t want to answer. She somehow seemed to be embarrassed by the smallest things.

“Enchanting brings in a lot of money.”

Liana gave an answer in her stead with a sullen expression.

“Enchanting pays well?”

“Do you think a wizard who can chant the Fireball spell or the one that can make Fireball scrolls earns more money?”

"…I'm not sure?"

"In order to make money, wizards specializing in destruction type of magic either try to become court wizards or escorts for noble families. The pay varies greatly depending on who one serves, and there aren't many open spots. Since the Demon World War ended, there had been no demand for these wizards. I mean, you'd even have to fight for your life in some situation if you take on that job, right? Enchanting, however, is safe and earns you money quite easily."

Thinking about it, what Liana said was actually quite obvious.

Magic Scrolls were items that enabled anyone to simply use magic, and the guys who made them would be raking in tons of money. On the other hand, wizards specializing in destruction-type magic would have a hard time getting jobs and earning money.

The Demon World War, where those wizards were most needed, had ended.

"…What? Doesn't that mean that all those wizards specialized in destruction-type magic would become unemployed?"

"Hmm… I guess so?"

As the War had ended, the demand for fighting power had sharply decreased, so many wizards had become unemployed.

"…Couldn't all of them become enchanters then?"

It was safe and made a lot of money, so wouldn't it be the best for all of them to learn that?

"What are you talking about?"

It was Harriet, not Liana, who answered me that time.

She looked at me as if I were an idiot.

CHAPTER 138

Harriet began to thoroughly explain the matter after hearing my statement that everyone should just become an Enchanter if it brought in that much money.

“If just anyone could become an Enchanter, the value of Scrolls would plummet. It’s said that Enchantment techniques are highly confidential, even in the Magic Association, and licenses are only issued to a small number of people to allow them to make use of those techniques. If someone were caught arbitrarily passing on the Enchantment techniques, they would be mercilessly pursued by the Magic Associations Hunters. This magic system is much more highly secured than you might imagine. That’s why they can’t teach those things in Temple. You can only learn those techniques after getting an Enchanter’s license from the Association.”

In order to maintain their price, the Magic Association strictly controlled the number of Enchanters. There seemed to be something called an Enchanter’s license test. I thought it was something like a public exam organized by the Magic Association.

“So, you’re saying they have a monopoly?”

“It’s an oligopoly. The Magic Association isn’t the only organization that has a hold of the enchantment techniques. However, wizard organizations with access to secret magic techniques such as Enchantment can’t be completely unrelated to the Association, so they are also very restrictive about the techniques.”

As I listened to them, I felt both puzzled and excited.

“Becoming a Battle Wizard is more or less a dead-end, so the smart wizards become Enchanters or Magic Crafters. A Wizard capable of Teleportation also has great prospects, but that’s all there is to it. Magic Crafters who are capable of magic Warp Gates and Mana Trains are considered much greater.”

To begin with, becoming a Wizard was reserved for those geniuses, but even among them, the ones who were deemed overwhelming geniuses majored in Magic Crafting, which was safe and could earn one a lot of money. Magic Crafters enjoyed a much better public reputation as well.

However, choosing that major was like trying to pick stars from the sky.

It was similar to saying that the geniuses of any medical school should go into plastic surgery, orthopedics, and dermatology.

Actually, when people thought of doctors, they thought of surgeons, but in reality, when medical students thought about which field they should go into, becoming a surgeon was a dead-end; applying that to Wizards, normally, people thought about wizards chanting great destructive spells, but becoming a battle wizard was a complete and utter dead-end.

So Adelia was trying to get an Enchanter's license to make money, even though she didn't actually have that talent.

Of course, Magic Crafters also seemed to make a lot of money, so she didn't absolutely need that Enchanter's license.

It was quite the strange setting that I had accidentally stumbled upon that was solidly integrated into this society.

Magic Scrolls were expensive.

Just because of that simple statement, the background that not everyone could simply make them was created, leading to the additional detail that Enchanters had to be the cream of the crop of wizards.

So, Adelia, a character residing in the main story, was also influenced to try getting an Enchanter's license, even though she didn't hold an enchanting talent.

I found it to be quite mysterious.

"Of course, this only concerns magic to earn money. Harriet is an exception."

There was bound to be a difference between people who decided to become wizards to earn money and those that didn't. Harriet had no reason to try and earn money with magic because she was the daughter of a lofty noble family—money was never even a concern.

There were people who went into the medical field just to become doctors and for no other reason, after all.

In Harriet's case, she had the freedom to choose any major she liked. Of course, she was already so talented that she could learn any magic in existence.

"I don't think approaching magic purely as a research subject is the right attitude for a wizard. I don't like people like that, either."

How dare you think about making money from magic…!! Magic is an art form… not a means to make money…! Screeech!

Both Adelia and Harriet trembled as if they knew quite a lot of wizards who spoke like that. Apparently, there was someone like that among the teachers of a class they had to attend.

That was why Adelia felt so ashamed that she went against the pure pursuit of magic, and Harriet seemed apologetic even though she didn't have to—her and Adelia's circumstances were simply different.

Adelia studied magic to earn money.

Harriet, on the other hand, simply studied it to master magic itself.

There was a reason why Adelia felt lesser when standing next to Harriet… because no one was better than Harriet in her field.

Adelia's talents, magic crafting, and summoning magic were already included in Harriet's talent.

Even though they were close… Actually, she must have felt absolutely inferior to Harriet.

Would they be okay if this went on? In the original story, nothing serious happened between the two.

"Hey, what is life?

Adelia slowly raised her head at my open remark.

"No matter what other people do or say, money is the best, you know? What's wrong with wanting to make money? It's something praiseworthy."

There was nothing greater than money, girl. So what if you want to earn some? Adelia's face slightly reddened at my words.

She was definitely the best friend of that habitual blusher, Harriet.

"Ah, yes… Thanks, Reinhardt…"

"Are you doing this to offend me? You shouldn't say those words again. They make others feel bad."

Adelia nodded slightly, and Liana just sighed at my remark that she felt was rather nasty.

"So what."

"Do you stand behind those words, even after someone pointed it out to you?"

"Of course."

"You're seriously crazy."

Liana clicked her tongue as if she didn't want to deal with me anymore, and Adelia just had her mouth slightly open, staring blankly, watching me quarreling with the young lady Grantz like that.

'Yeah, I knew that you were that kind of guy, but I still don't get it', that was what her expression seemed to say.

Liana smiled and looked at Harriet.

"Hey, when we graduate, let's start with getting rid of this crazy guy."

Harriet lightened up at Liana's suggestion and nodded.

"Yeah! Let's do that, no matter what! You're dead when you graduate!"

Adelia's complexion turned snow-white hearing the two's plot, and Ellen, who also seemed to have noticed that something was happening, looked over.

I simply smiled.

"…If that's the case, do you really think I would let you graduate without a hitch?"

Did you actually think you would be able to graduate safely?

At my words, Harriet's and Liana's faces seemed to say, "Oh, he was someone capable enough of that, wasn't he?"

* * *

"I'm going to relax."

When we went back to talking about our vacation plans, Liana said she would simply relax.

"Where?"

"I usually tour around the places my family has villas in."

It seemed that Liana was planning to relax by traveling around the places her family owned villas in.

"Right. But I think I will just go to the Edina archipelago this time."

"Edina archipelago? Where is that place?"

It looked like none of them had heard of the Edina archipelago, but I flinched slightly. It was the southernmost island country of the continent where Airi had opened a bar.

"It's an island country south of Kernstadt, but there aren't any Gates connected to it, so people don't go there often. I heard it's a great place. It's like a secret tourist destination."

"If there aren't any Gates connecting to that place, are you going there by boat?"

Liana shook her head at Adelia's question.

"If I went there by boat, vacations would be over before I even reached the place. I'm going with my butler."

“Your butler?”

“Yeah. My butler is a wizard. We’re going to teleport there.”

Adelia was completely stunned by those words.

Her butler wasn’t just some servant; he was actually a high-ranking wizard skilled enough to use Teleport. Only Duke Grantz would be able to hire someone like that just for simple trips.

Adelia seemed to feel that she was rather distant from them every time Harriet and Grantz said things like that.

Of course, our little glutton was munching on the cake I had ordered but hadn’t touched yet.

…Although she went out with us, she was no different from usual.

She showed no reaction at all and only ate a lot.

‘Why did you go with them? No, why did they even take you with them? Were these three just that nice?’

I found it really upsetting!

I felt like a parent seeing their daughter not properly getting along with her friends.

Her friends are so nice, but why is my kid like this?!

Sorry for raising such an ungrateful kid, everyone!

Anyway, Liana planned on traveling during the vacation.

“I’m just going back home, but like Adelia, I’m going to continue my magic research with my brothers’ help.”

Harriet seemed like she wanted to return to The Saint-Owan Grand Duchy and study. Temple had good facilities, but they absolutely couldn’t hold a glass to the ones in the Grand Duchy; since her brothers were also wizards, she would be able to ask them for advice.

In many ways, Harriet was in a position in which she didn't have to come to Temple to study magic.

Next, their eyes turned towards me.

"Well, I don't really have any plans."

I really had no idea whether I should go out or stay in Temple. I could stay behind and train, but I also wanted to do something more meaningful.

The only one left was Ellen.

"What about Ellen?"

I described how Ludwig spent his vacation, but not Ellen's. When a question was directed at her, she started to talk while she cut off a slice of her cake and ate it.

"I originally planned on staying home and resting…"

It seemed like she originally planned to go back to her hometown to rest, but it looked like she had changed her mind.

"I'm going to register as an adventurer."

"What?!"

"…All of a sudden?"

"Why an adventurer?"

"Isn't that dangerous?"

All of us were shocked about her bombshell reveal in our own ways.

'What? You wanted to become an adventurer? What kind of bullshit is that?'

"I want to go to the Darklands."

I felt like my hair was turning white from shock.

That punk had finally turned crazy.

* * *

Everyone fell into a frenzy at her declaration.

“Ellen, Not all demons are dead yet, even if the Demon World War ended.”

“I know.”

Ellen just nodded at Liana’s words, saying she already knew that.

“Why do adventurers go to the Darklands?”

“The Darklands haven’t been explored well yet, so if you find an undiscovered area or something unusual in the Darklands and report it, it seems like the Adventurer’s Guild will pay you. They’re called dungeons or something like that.”

At Adelia’s question, Ellen started talking about money. Like that, I finally found out how the hell adventurers made a living.

However, she wasn’t going to the Darklands to earn money, right? That was just something extra.

“Y-you aren’t going alone, are you?”

“I’m going alone.”

“No! Y-you… This. I know you’re strong, but… What are you going to do if you run into a strong Demon?!”

Harriet, who knew that Ellen could summon that mysterious sword, seemed to think it was completely absurd for her to do this, even though she was a bit stronger than others.

“I'll take a teleportation scroll from Temple with me. If things get dangerous, I’ll use it.”

It was crazy.

It looked like it wasn't just a vague thought; she had already reported her vacation plans to Temple, and they even decided to give her a teleportation scroll, one of the most expensive ones.

Even if she was part of Royal Class, why would they do that? Was Ellen that special?

Everyone asked her worried questions one by one.

Except for me…

"Don't go."

I spoke firmly, not worriedly.

'Do you want to die after wandering about that dangerous place? What is this kid even talking about?'

This development definitely didn't happen in the original.

"Don't go. Why are you even doing this?"

"…"

After answering the other kids' questions thoroughly, Ellen just kept staring at me silently for a long time.

"…Okay."

Everyone's expression turned quite strange when they heard her give up on her plans so suddenly.

What?

That was what was written on everyone's faces.

"I won't go…"

It wasn't just those three.

I also felt that it was quite strange.

CHAPTER 139

In the evening, when we returned to the dormitory.

“Hey.”

After the others had entered their rooms, I called out to Ellen.

“…Yes?”

"Let’s talk for a bit."

* * *

I took Ellen to the park in front of the dormitory. She followed me, trailing slightly behind me. After confirming that no one was around, I turned towards her.

“Hey.”

“?”

“Why are you looking at me like that these days?”

She had been looking at me a lot since my kidnapping incident. She had said that she wanted to go to the Darklands, and it had felt like she was very determined in her decision.

Then I told her to not go to such a dangerous place.

The Ellen I knew would have at least acted stubborn, or that was what I expected, so I found it very weird that she had simply said that she wouldn’t go just because I told her not to.

The kid who had never looked at me properly before suddenly couldn’t keep her eyes off of me.

I knew the reason. Some time ago, she had decided to keep her distance from me, but

then that strange kidnapping incident had occurred.

She thought she didn't need me, but when I actually disappeared, she was greatly shocked.

Then, she regretted uttering the words she directed at me and felt apologetic towards me, and it seemed like she even blamed herself that I got kidnapped. It wasn't her fault, of course.

She said that she couldn't stand it because her brother and I, who both had a lot of secrets, kept on overlapping in her mind.

However, in the end, she realized she couldn't cut me out of her life, so she felt guilty, thinking everything was her fault.

That was why she tried to read my face a lot. She was afraid of making another mistake.

"Did you do something bad to me? Maybe. Then something unfortunate happened you couldn't have predicted. My kidnapping has nothing to do with you. You even went looking for me. I'm really grateful for that, so thank you. What are you so sorry for?"

While I was saying this to Ellen, she had her gaze lowered.

"…I don't know."

Ellen held her head low; she couldn't even meet my eyes.

"You don't know… what?"

"I don't want to make the same mistake again, but I don't know how to avoid doing that."

She still seemed to regret her actions from back then.

"I don't know… why this keeps happening."

Ellen didn't want to say anything else she would regret as she had before. She seemed to think that what she had said before was a huge mistake.

That was why she had been tiptoeing around me like that. That was why she said she didn't go to the Darklands after I told her not to.

If she insisted on going after I told her not to go, she thought I might get angry or feel hurt.

Ellen had looked fine up to then because Ellen usually didn't care much about others—she just did what she wanted to do. She didn't care about anyone's opinion.

But ultimately, she was still very inexperienced in dealing with other people. That was why she didn't know how to treat people who disagreed with her. Before, she didn't care at all about others, but she had found that care growing over time.

Can I do this? Can I say that?

Ellen couldn't find a proper answer for these concerns she had, so she eventually started to watch me closely. She had already made a mistake once, so she didn't want to make another one; she became a lot more careful.

She didn't know how to treat me.

It was good and all that she was treating me as an important friend, but I didn't want her to look at me like that.

It just wasn't like her.

I didn't want her to be so self-conscious around me.

"Sit down."

I made her sit down on a bench, and I sat down next to her.

In the end, even though she had the best talents in the world, she was such a clumsy person in terms of interpersonal problems. I was the first person she could call a friend, after all.

After experiencing my disappearance once, she must have thought about what I meant to her.

She thought that she had to do better when she was around me.

However, she didn't know how to act to make that happen.

"You know I lied, right?"

"…About the kidnapping?"

"Yeah."

-Nod

Ellen said that she was no longer curious about my secrets, telling me that it was fine as long as I was all right.

But that was wrong, she must have still been curious, and she must have still been struggling because she didn't know much about me; it made me overlap more and more with her brother in her mind, and she would only get more and more stressed about it.

Of course, Ellen knew that had I lied about the details of my kidnapping. However, she didn't know the truth behind it. She probably thought that Loyar must have done something.

"Actually, I was kidnapped by the Thieves' Guild."

"The Thieves' Guild?"

Ellen seemed to know about the Thieves' Guild. Then again, maybe she didn't really know; I couldn't see Ellen as someone taking an interest in the criminal gangs of the Imperial Capital.

"Yeah, you went to visit big sis, right?"

"…Yes."

"Her gang is like a subcontractor to the Thieves' Guild, so to speak. Our gang consists mostly of beggars, so they easily pick up information and rumors from the streets. We give that information to the Thieves' Guild in exchange for money. Do you understand what I'm talking about?"

"Subcontractor…?"

It seemed like that was the first time Ellen had heard that word in her life.

Right, it wasn't a word she needed to know.

"Like a minion."

"Ah… Okay."

I figured I could tell Ellen the truth about this much, at least.

She wasn't an untrustworthy person that would go around and spill things—she wouldn't tell anyone.

Honestly, it was quite touching. In the end, she had acted like that because she had thought of me as an important person to her.

I was going to tell her everything about it.

I'd realized I would rather tell her all of it.

* * *

Ellen's eyes widened as she realized that I was confiding in her. She didn't seem to think that I was actually going to tell her anything.

"As you know, our organization is a gathering of beggars, and it wouldn't be easy for such a group to send someone to Temple. The tuition of Temple is just too expensive, right?"

"…Yes."

"As you know, I have a bit of an advantage in certain matters right?"

I strangely knew a lot for my age. It was even stranger knowing my origins.

"That organization wanted to raise me as its successor; that was why they sent me to Temple. 'When you graduate, let's live more like people.' That's what they told me. Yeah, although our group isn't really a criminal gang, they were trying to raise me as the heir to a criminal organization."

"…Okay."

"However, when I came to Temple, it was assessed that I had infinite aptitudes or something, so they sent me to Royal Class."

"…I see."

Ellen nodded blankly.

"Anyway, I want our organization to break free from the Thieves' Guild's influence. As you know, I was originally planning on quietly going to Temple as a regular student, but then I ended up in the Royal Class, and there were so many influential people in there. If my circumstances had been revealed, there would have been a lot of sparks flying."

The Royal Class was full of children of incredibly influential families as well as the Imperial Prince and Princess, so I wanted to break off my connection with any criminal organization because I was afraid that I would get sucked into the fight between influential people and explode in the process.

Of course, not all of that was true.

"Anyway, I wanted our organization to sever ties with the Thieves' Guild, so I planned out some things, but it seemed like that went against their intentions. They were trying to get rid of us. However, when I went into the back alleys of the Wenster Market without knowing it was their turf, I got caught by them during the rainy season. They didn't kidnap me because they knew it was me, but they found out after they tied me up. They planned on using me as bait to lure big sis to them to kill her."

Ellen silently listened to my recounts of the underworld's affairs, looking as if she couldn't believe it.

She probably thought that Loyar and the beggar group were a little strange, but it seemed like she couldn't believe my story portraying the power struggle between the Thieves' Guild and our organization in the underworld.

She seemed shocked to find out that I came from such a world; she also seemed surprised at how calmly I was talking about someone potentially killing someone else.

Of course, I wasn't the heir to some huge organization.

However, Ellen was an outsider.

She seemed to think that I was some huge boss living in a constant battle against other huge organizations. She felt like I lived a completely different life from her.

No… It wasn't really like that, though…

"How… did you manage?"

They are such a terrible criminal organization. You were kidnapped by the Thieves' Guild, a much larger organization than Loyar's. How did you manage to stay safe?

That was what Ellen was asking.

"My organization wasn't the deciding factor there, but, rather, my status. I'm a Royal Class student. The Imperial Prince and Princess are in our grade. It was a mistake to even consider kidnapping me."

In fact, as soon as the Guild Master had seen me, he had realized that he would be in a lot of shit, and he had almost had a mental breakdown.

"The Guild Master knew that it was a mistake as soon as he saw me. It's a bit hard to go into any details, but Bertus and Charlotte immediately found out that they were the culprits on around Wednesday."

"Wednesday?"

I had come back on Saturday.

They already found the culprit on Wednesday, but why did you only come back on Saturday?

It seemed that Ellen was curious about that.

"I asked them to not tell anyone that they had found me. I had some business to take care of in the Thieves' Guild."

My status remained as 'missing'. Ellen seemed to understand less and less about

what had happened.

“I did that because I was trying to absorb the Thieves’ Guild into our organization.”

Ellen looked as if she had given up on thinking.

“Didn’t you say that you didn’t want to be involved with criminal organizations anymore?”

“That’s true, but…”

I didn’t want to be found, but Charlotte and Bertus had found me right away.

“Depending on the situation, I might change my mind. So anyway, I failed to completely absorb the Thieves’ Guild, but they said that they would one day pay me back for saving them by covering up the incident.”

I didn't tell her anything about me becoming the King of the Underworld. I wasn’t really sure if I wanted to do that or not. Even if I decided to do it, I would be completely in Bertus’s palm.

And I sure didn’t know if I would be any good running all that.

I told Ellen about the rough outlines of my background and the truth behind my disappearance.

“I… I see…”

Ellen nodded her head.

I was the heir to a criminal gang and had such enormous guts that I even made plans to absorb the Thieves’ Guild in such a risky situation.

Ellen nodded again, as if she somewhat understood what had happened, even if it didn’t explain everything.

She seemed shocked that I was a greater person than she first thought. It was clear that she had a lot of misunderstandings about what I told her, though.

She was making a face as if she thought I was actually quite the dangerous person,

but that was just how great I really was.

No. It wasn't enough yet.

"But actually, that's just a disguise."

"…What?"

I still had more to say.

"Actually, I'm the last remaining heir to the Demon Realm."

"…?"

"But I don't really care about war, so I just infiltrated the human realm to live comfortably."

Ellen's expression slightly distorted as if she wanted to say, "What kind of bullshit is this?".

I could see question marks appearing in her eyes.

Why are you saying that now?

A demon?

Are you kidding me right now?

Are you crazy?

That was what her expression seemed to convey.

No.

It was still too early to be surprised.

"But actually, that's also just a disguise."

"…?"

A disguise piled on top of a disguise piled on top of another disguise.

I was telling her the complete truth.

“I’m actually the creator of this world but was forced to possess one being of this world as punishment."

Ellen’s feelings went beyond bewilderment and absurdity and became as quiet as a lake. The level of absurdity went beyond what she could grasp, so she just calmed down instead.

Ellen’s eyes were so cold. I had never seen her looking at me like that before. It was like the frightening look Charlotte and Bertus sometimes showed me.

However, Ellen’s seemed somehow different.

I didn’t just feel pressured… I felt like I was really going to die.

I even felt like she might really murder me right there and then.

D-did I cross the line by saying something about Demons in front of Ellen?

B-but she said that she wanted to know more about me…

I was telling the truth…

"If you don’t want to tell me."

Cold.

“Just say nothing.”

-Bam!

“Urg!"

Ellen slapped me with all her might for the first time.

She cursed at me, jumped up, grunted, and went back to Temple.

“Owow, This seriously hurts.”

Yeah.

Who the hell would believe that shit?

It seemed that the talk about Demons was a bit much, but since she felt like I was kidding, she lost all feelings of guilt towards me.

You know who my brother is, and you still say this shit? Are you actually crazy?

She probably was seriously angry with me.

However, it was the whole and complete truth she so desperately wanted to know, even if it was very hard to believe.

Perhaps because of my ‘teasing’, Ellen treated me normally the next day.

CHAPTER 140

Ellen seemed to somewhat believe what I told her about the criminal organization stuff, but when I started talking about demons and being the world's creator, she felt like I was making fun of her.

As she became rather angry and thought I was joking with her, Ellen went back to treating me like usual.

Ellen didn't go to train with Loyar every day. Sometimes, she would come to the training room and spar with me.

Of course, since I had been practicing with Cliffman a lot those days, things had changed a bit.

"Hey, you two should try sparring."

"?"

"…With me?"

Ellen and Cliffman usually ignored each other in the training room, but because I was on somewhat better terms with Cliffman, I tried to serve as a middle man so that they could talk with each other.

Ellen's attitude was confident, while Cliffman seemed rather nervous.

"…"

He had given me that impression ever since I had been sparring with him. He didn't really talk much to anyone, and he was a bit awkward, even when facing me.

However, his opponent would be Ellen.

She was Ellen Artorius, who more than deserved the title of the most beautiful girl of the region.

Of course, someone who wasn't good with people wouldn't be any better with someone of the opposite sex. Cliffman couldn't even properly look Ellen in her eyes as they faced each other.

Could someone who even acted so awkwardly properly fight with Ellen?

Wouldn't he end up feeling so nauseous that he might throw up?

'Maybe I shouldn't have proposed this… '

They hadn't even started, but Cliffman seemed so nervous that I could see his eyes swimming.

"I'm coming."

-Jump!

Ellen jumped forward.

-Bam!

"Uuurk!"

Cliffman was beaten before he could even react to the training sword coming down on his head.

-Plop

"…"

"…"

Ellen stared at Cliffman with her usual expressionless face.

No, she wasn't expressionless, actually.

She looked very confused.

Ah, that reminded me of the first time I had sparred with Ellen.

I didn't lose because I was nervous that time, though; I had just lost because I was totally inexperienced. Ellen blankly stared down at Cliffman, who she overpowered in a single blow.

"What should I do?"

Ellen looked towards me and muttered. It was as clear as day that she was really perplexed.

"Let's go to the priest on duty…"

"…Yeah."

Ellen and I had to fully support the fainted Cliffman from both sides as we took him to the priest.

* * *

Fortunately, he didn't get seriously injured and quickly came back to his senses after the priest cast a recovery spell on him.

"…"

Cliffman's face was red; he felt so embarrassed that he got knocked out after getting hit on his head with a training sword that he couldn't even open his mouth.

"Why didn't you block?"

Ellen saw him train as well, so she knew that Cliffman was quite the talented fighter. However, he didn't even manage to block, parry, or avoid her first move but got hit right on the head as he was spacing out.

I knew to some extent what happened, but Ellen didn't seem to understand why he had frozen up.

Well, I didn't know if everyone was like that, but definitely knew that there were a truckload of people who would get so nervous they wouldn't manage to get even a single word out in front of a girl like her.

Unfortunately, Cliffman was one of them.

“Th-that’s… It’s…”

Cliffman was so flustered that he even began to stutter because he couldn’t possibly tell her the reason.

They were the original two outsiders of Class A:

Ellen, and Cliffman.

They both, in their own ways, had serious problems maintaining interpersonal relationships.

“You did just fine against Reinhardt."

“Th-that’s… That…”

“…Can you only say that?”

“That’s…! Th-that’s not it…”

There was nothing as crazy as watching those two with their poor interpersonal skills trying to communicate with each other.

* * *

Due to Cliffman fainting, our evening practice came to quite an early end. He wasn’t seriously injured, so he left the priest’s office and went back to the dormitory.

“I’m going to eat something. Do you want to come with me?”

When I asked Cliffman this, his face turned red again, and he shook his head.

“N-no! I-it’s okay! I’m full! Yeah!”

He had probably already used up all his social energy for the day, so if he stayed close to Ellen even a bit longer, he might actually start crying and vomiting before finally collapsing.

Was he that much of an outsider? It seemed like it was especially bad when he was confronted with girls.

“I-I’m off then!”

Cliffman took off at full speed and disappeared into his room.

“He’s a weirdo.”

How serious was it to be treated by Ellen as a weirdo? Of course, Ellen immediately walked towards the dining room, completely forgetting all matters concerning Cliffman.

“I want to eat steak.”

“That isn’t what one calls a snack, though?”

“Stew. With beef.”

“Are you doing this on purpose?"

Ellen looked at me and nodded her head.

“ Yes.”

It felt pretty nice that she had gone back to her normal self.

It was a good sign.

"Then how about you make it, huh?”

“I don’t know how to.”

Ellen seemed to have realized that treating me like she normally would was for the best. Maybe it was because she realized I wasn’t easily hurt or something.

“Since I don’t know how to make it, you do it once. I’ll cook next time.”

Why did she seem more brazen than usual, though?

* * *

Eventually, I made some beef stew in the middle of the night.

-Munch, munch, munch

“I must have gotten your habits wrong.”

Since we had been eating like that almost daily, I ended up getting tired of things I could easily make. If one ate fried eggs or sausages every day, one would get sick of that, eventually.

So, sometimes, I made more complicated food, but that girl remembered all the meals I made.

Of course, she had stopped asking me to cook for a bit because she felt so conscious of me, but she immediately turned into a hungry swarm of locusts again when she returned to her usual self.

She had also seen me make that dish before, so she should know how to make it to a certain extent, but what others made always tasted more delicious.

Yeah, even noodles tasted better if someone else cooked them, so it should also be true for other foods, right?

“Where did you learn this?” Ellen asked curiously.

If it had been just the previous day, she wouldn’t have asked, but she decided to not be so conscious of me anymore and just said what came to mind.

Of course, I had learned to cook by watching Youtube videos. You just had to search what you’d like to make, and you would get millions of results.

“What do you mean with ‘learn’? I read some cookbooks, that’s it.”

Of course, I didn’t just remember all these recipes; I had actually bought a cookbook and thoroughly read it. I bought it to check if I remembered the recipes right, rather than learn how to make them. However, there were many dishes in there I didn’t originally know how to make; one of them was beef stew. I learned it from the book.

Ellen was a little surprised when she heard that I had bought a cookbook.

“What? Are you impressed? I didn’t buy it because of you, though.”

Ah…

Shit…

That was like the standard phrase of a Tsundere.

I seriously wanted to turn back the time a minute.

I had bought the book so that I could make those meals, but I don't actually cook when I'm alone!

In a way, I had bought it because of her. There was no one else who would make those meals for you her, after all!

"I didn't say anything."

"…Could you just hit me, please?"

"You won't be able to cook."

She refused to hit me.

Ellen was really eager to eat that stew.

I had something to ask her now that she had returned to normal.

"Hey. Why did you want to go to the Darklands?"

Money couldn't have been her goal. If her goal was money, she should have just sold those Teleportation Scrolls that she was supposed to get from Temple.

"Practical experience."

"…Practical?"

"Yes. Last time I felt like I didn't have any practical experience when I was fighting."

Ellen wasn't the most conceited person. However, as she lost to Loyar, it seemed to have been a huge shock to her.

It was a grave reminder that she didn't have any practical experience. Of course, she wasn't intimidated or nervous when it came to sparring, but one could only find the real danger of death in actual battles.

Ellen was shocked by her defeat, but it seemed that it ended up being a big stimulus to her. Not much time had passed since then, but it seemed like she had already improved tremendously.

She was terrifyingly strong, to begin with, but the speed of her improvement was even more terrifying.

"Isn't it a little much to head there because you want some practical experience? And why would you even take that risk to get stronger? The Demon World War is over."

I was training so strictly because I knew that the Gate Incident would happen later on. Ellen becoming stronger was a good thing, though, if I thought about what would happen in the future.

However, Ellen had no reason to be in such a rush to get stronger. What if she died for nothing while fighting with someone in the Darklands in order to gain practical experience?

"There are many reasons to become strong; that reason doesn't have to be something like the Demon World War."

Ellen only said that, but I could guess the meaning behind those words.

She didn't want to feel helpless and lacking in strength when it mattered. Eventually, she became stronger, but there wasn't a place where she could use that strength freely.

"And I heard that there are many dungeons and hidden treasures in the Darklands other than the Demon King's Castle."

I didn't know how adventurers made a living, but the Darklands weren't completely calm yet; people probably went there to explore and look for treasures.

Ellen seemed to look for something like a powerful magical item that might hide there. I had no idea about that place because I never set it up properly. There were parts in which Ludwig went to explore some dungeons, but they were in the Human

Realm, not in the Darklands.

Anyway, the job description of an adventurer wasn't part of the main story. I didn't even know what adventurers did for a living.

At the moment, their main target seemed to be the treasures of the Darklands. Ellen seemed fascinated by them as well.

"…Isn't Lament enough?"

Even if she went there and sacked everything she could find there, nothing would be as good as her sword Lament. That sword was a crazy cheat item with the added passive skill of being abnormally sharp—it was something one could call a trope of fantasy novels.

Loyar, who was able to block Lament with her bare hands, was just incredibly strong; it wasn't that the sword was weak.

"There's nothing wrong with getting more. Right?"

Ellen's longing for power seemed to have spread to her martial belongings as well. Ellen wanted to find the Darklands' treasures, even though she had no idea what they would be.

Of course, finding treasure was only secondary; she wanted to get stronger and gain some practical experience in the Darklands. If things got dangerous, she had planned to just run away by using the Teleport Scroll.

"I'm not going, anyway."

I told Ellen not to go, so no matter what her reasons might have been, it seemed like she changed her mind and decided not to go anymore.

I didn't know whether I could call her obedient or not.

There were many powerful magical items in this world I had never actually set up.

An example of that was Sarkegaar's ring and the Flame of Tuesday that I wore.

"Hey."

“ Yes?”

Going to the Darklands might not be as bad as I thought.

"I’ll go with you."

“…?

It would be dangerous if she went there alone, but I was sure that things would be far less dangerous if I went with her.

I finally decided what I wanted to do for my vacation.

“No.”

As I was already drawing out the plans in my head, Ellen resolutely shook her head.

“You can’t fight.”

Ah.

Right.

Were we really that different? Didn’t she know that I could help her with various things?

I mean, she was right, so I couldn’t retort…

But wasn’t that just too much!?

“…I’m hurt.”

“…Sorry, but that’s the truth.”

Bitch…

I felt the strong urge for a drink.

CHAPTER 141

Certainly, Ellen was abnormally strong for a single person; however, my physical strength and technique also couldn't be compared to a normal person either. I'm also a supernatural power user.

But, of course, there was a huge difference between Ellen and me. It was only natural for her to think that I would be in danger if I followed her to the Darklands to gain practical experience.

The reason she had told me not to go with her wasn't because she thought I would get in her way but because I might be in danger.

"If you don't go with me, I'll just go alone."

"…?"

In the end, I had to try such a strategy.

"You told me not to go."

You told me not to go because it's dangerous. Why are you suddenly saying that you want to go?

That was what was written on her face.

"I don't know! Anyway, come with me! I'm good at fighting too! I'm not as good as you, but I'm still good enough! I'm going! You know I improved quite a lot, right?"

"…Sigh."

Ellen looked at me in shock when I suddenly said these things. She looked somewhat tired.

"Why all of a sudden?"

It seemed like Ellen also had thought of going there, but she seemed puzzled when I

told her that I wanted to go without any hesitation.

“You said there were treasures.”

“…Yes.”

“So there’s money to be earned.”

In the end, the only excuse I could come up with was money.

No, I mean, if we found something like some amazing treasure and got some money out of it, it would also help with my organization, and Airi wouldn’t have to work so hard. Wasn’t that good?

That was why I needed money. Ellen should also have somewhat grasped this.

“…Let’s go somewhere safe then; this is not the only vacation we will have.”

In the end, she just sighed as if she had given up.

* * *

Ellen reluctantly agreed to it after I told her that I would follow close to her and that I would stay in safe areas.

I insisted on going even though she told me I shouldn’t go. I know I was dog scum, but when I heard her reason for going to the Darklands, I also felt like it was worth going there.

Ellen didn’t know, but it was actually a lot safer for her to be with me.

I didn’t pay much attention to our final exams, so I didn’t do anything different even during the exam period—I didn’t care about grades.

I found myself in Eleris’s store after my classes at Temple were over. I went there with the excuse of delivering the letters. It was right after I wrote a reply to the letter Charlotte gave me.

The area really didn’t get monitored at all anymore, so I could go in and out of that place as much as I wanted.

“Eleris.”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

“I heard that adventurers are going to the Darklands. Is that true?”

Ellen seemed quite troubled about taking me with her, but if she didn’t take me, it was very likely that she wouldn’t get anything out of it.

I had three people with me who were very familiar with the Darklands.

“Ah, it seems like the number of adventurers has been increasing lately. It’s probably because of the Darklands.”

And the Al Ligar Shopping Street, where Eleris’s shop was located, was a gathering place for adventurers of sorts. Even if Eleris didn’t know about the situation of the Darklands that well, she couldn’t help but know about places where adventures would flock to.

“Are there that many treasures in the Darklands?”

“Hmm… The Allied Forces must have already plundered the Demon King’s Castle, but since the Darklands is very large, there should be treasures scattered here and there that the adventurers covet. There are more than can be found in the lands of humans, where the adventurers usually roam, at least.”

Originally, adventurers wouldn’t go to dangerous places like the Darklands. However, since the Demon World War ended with humanity’s victory, they slowly gravitated towards the Darklands.

But her wording was rather strange.

There were many. That didn’t mean there were a lot.

“You don’t know if there are any treasures left in the Darklands, do you?”

Eleris smiled at my words.

“The land is just too large, so there are many things I don’t know. However, since there are a lot of Demon Tribes, wouldn’t they all have their own treasures? There

should also be some dungeons hidden around."

Eleris said that one person couldn't know everything about the Darklands, and that should be right.

But what did she mean about Demon Tribes?

"Weren't all Demon Tribes destroyed during the Demon World War?"

"Ah, I think I know what you mean."

Eleris seemed to have remembered again that I had little knowledge about the Great War and the Darklands because I lost my memory.

* * *

"The previous Demon King called upon the most powerful Demon Tribes before the Demon World War. However, not all demons had been summoned, so there are still countless Demon Tribes remaining in the Darklands. Each Faction that participated in the war probably left their successors behind as a last resort."

It was true that the Demon King had issued a general mobilization order, but he had not summoned every demon. So, when the Demon King died, the Demon Realm collapsed, but it wasn't completely destroyed.

"There were also some that didn't heed the call. They should be pretty strong."

"…Did you not heed the call?"

"Yes. This was mainly the case for Demon Tribes located on the outskirts of the Demon Realm, far from the influence of the previous Demon King."

That was another thing I didn't know.

Those demons who lived far away from the Demon King and never saw him refused to comply with the order because the Demon King's control on them fell short. They just pretended that they didn't know whether the Demon Realm was facing destruction or not, as they were far away from the War anyway.

"Hmm… So, the Allied Forces basically did something like a focused attack on the

Demon King's Castle to capture it, but since a total occupation was impossible, they just withdrew after achieving their goal, right?"

"Yes."

It would cost a huge amount of money and manpower to protect the occupied areas. The human forces, including all of the Allied Forces, just couldn't afford to occupy the entirety of the Darklands.

It was also true that the larger Demon Tribes, including the high-ranking demons of the Darklands, suffered devastating damage and lost a lot of power while trying to counter the humans.

However, in the end, the humans hardly looted any other place in the Darklands other than the Demon King's Castle.

And thus, adventurers were slowly flocking to the place to steal the remaining treasures of the demons who had already lost their power, and such treasures actually existed.

"Why are you suddenly so curious about the Darklands?"

I frowned at Eleris's question.

"We're in need of money."

"Ah… Yes."

Honestly, although we had no urgent need for it, there were a lot of things we needed.

"I'm going to go treasure hunting during my vacation."

"…What?"

Eleris couldn't help but be astonished at my plan on plundering my home country because I needed money.

Yeah, seriously.

Now that I thought about it, it made me look like a real bastard.

From the point of view of adventurers, they were just going out to defeat some evil Demons and bring back some treasure, but if I were to do it, things would be very different.

It would turn into the crazy situation of the heir to the Demon Realm looting the Darklands.

“If you need treasure, you don’t have to go there; I could go alone… Even though I don’t exactly know where they are, but…”

Although Ellen was a wall that I couldn’t possibly cross, even Ellen couldn’t compare to Eleris at that moment.

If my sole goal was to hunt for treasures, I didn’t need to go with Ellen; I could just send Eleris to do it for me.

“I’m not going alone.”

Of course, treasures were nice and all, but there was something else as well.

“You’re not going alone, you say… Are you talking about the kid Loyar was complaining about?”

“Yeah. She wants to gain practical experience.”

It was much more important to make Ellen’s desire for practical experience as safe as possible.

It was important for me to become stronger, but in order to prepare well for the future, it was far better for Ellen, who had a much higher level of potential than me, to become strong.

Technically speaking, it was better to turn Ellen into a monster than to make myself stronger.

Eleris, who didn’t seem to understand the reason behind it all, also seemed unable to comprehend that I was trying to help Ellen build up some practical experience.

Rather, if I were to go there to start the Reconstruction of the Demon Realm, Eleris would understand it even though she would dislike it, but she seemed unable to understand why I would help out my classmate like that.

“It would be dangerous if she went there alone, so I decided to go with her.”

“That’s… I understand what you’re saying, but… It could also be dangerous for Your Highness as well.”

“…I know. I can’t rule over the Demons in this state.”

My Demon Domination ability was sealed while I was disguised as a human using Sarkegaar’s ring. I had to return to my original form as a horned Demon to use my ability properly.

Demon Domination itself was a characteristic unique to Arcdemons, so it couldn’t be helped. However, Eleris shook her head at my words.

“It would be the same even if you turned back into your true self.”

“…What? Why?”

It would be dangerous for me even if I could use Demon Domination?

Why? Didn’t that power make demons basically harmless to me?

“Your Highness’s power is still weak. If you were to meet an opponent you can’t control, they might attack Your Highness.”

“That wasn’t the case at the Demon King’s castle, though?”

I mean, orcs basically jumped forward to protect me.

“…They were the Demon King’s soldiers, right? They had already been trained, so there’s a high possibility that the demons of the outskirts and unintelligent demons won’t recognize Your Highness and that you won’t be able to control them.”

What?!

I thought I would be invincible in the Darklands!

I had thought I would only be in danger if I sealed Demon Domination on purpose!

“Actually, Your Highness can’t rule over demons like Sarkegaar or Loyar either, right?”

…That was right.

They followed me out of loyalty, not because I exercised control over them.

At my level, any demon could easily stab me in the back, and those who didn’t know me wouldn’t even recognize me.

Even if they knew who I was, I might not get the reaction I wanted.

No matter if I went with my true appearance or as Reinhardt, I would be in danger.

“Eleris.”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

“Is there really only one good thing about being an Archdemon?”

I bought my talents with achievement points. The ability to dominate the demons was still seriously lacking… I couldn’t even use it in that state, and I felt really uncomfortable because I was a demon. What was good about any of it?

The Demon King Valier was such a fucking munchkin, so why was I useless?

Did I not have anything because Valier was actually supposed to die or something?

“Hmm… Archdemons have a very long lifespan, Your Highness.”

“…I see.”

That was a good thing! Yeah!

It was unbelievably good, but it was a long-term advantage, so it didn’t really help much with the situation I was in!

The previous Demon King was originally like me, but after living for a long time and

training hard, he became strong!

The demons living in the outskirts didn't even heed the previous Demon King's order. There obviously were hostile forces in the Darkland that didn't really care about the Demon King.

Anyway…

I realized I shouldn't go with just Ellen alone. It would be dangerous if it was just us two.

"Eleris, you should integrate yourself into our party as if you were going to the Darklands yourself. You just have to make an excuse; it doesn't have to be anything detailed."

Eleris had already disguised herself as a former adventurer wizard, so we just had to put her in our party.

In the end, my ability to rule over demons couldn't be our insurance.

"You could just pretend to be some kind of eccentric wizard and come protect us in case of an emergency."

"…Ah."

I made Eleris our insurance instead.

CHAPTER 142

Eleris thought about it for a bit before she nodded and said that she would do as I said. Sarkegaar was disguised as a noble, and Loyar was busy running her gang. Eleris, on the other hand, had nothing else to do but run her job that didn't have much business to begin with, so it wouldn't be difficult for her to take some time during my vacation.

Leaving Eleris' store, I returned to Temple and handed Charlotte my reply letter.

"Thank you as always, Reinhardt."

"Don't mention it. It's nothing difficult, after all."

It should have been about time that she got used to it, but when I saw Charlotte secretly responding to my messages, she still seemed extremely excited, so I continued to feel guilty.

I even made sure that I used different handwriting to write those letters. I felt like a professional scammer.

"By the way, about what we wanted to investigate last time… let's slowly start on that, okay?"

"Oh… That?"

The Demon Gods' Church and the Revolutionary Forces.

We had put it off for a long time by then, so I still hadn't found out anything about them. There was not only the rainy season but also my kidnapping incident. It seemed like she thought that if we put it off any further, it would be our vacation, so it couldn't be delayed anymore.

"…What about the final exams?"

Charlotte looked a little displeased at my mention of the final exams.

“Reinhardt… Although you sometimes seem to forget this fact, I’m the Imperial Princess.”

From my point of view, those two matters were obviously more important than the final exam.

“Anyway, I don’t think it’s as serious as I thought. I’m still preparing well enough for the final exam, so don’t worry.”

Charlotte’s attitude showed that she would do well on something like a mere final exam.

“Ah, come to think of it, Reinhardt, you might be concerned about this… Well, should I just go investigate on my own then?” Charlotte asked, remembering my grades from the midterm exams. She thought I might be seriously concerned about my grades and all that.

Even though I didn’t really look like someone good at studying, I had still reached 1st place, so it looked like I had to completely give up trying to appear like a normal student for the rest of my life, huh.

“No, it’s fine. I don’t really care much about the finals.”

Of course, I didn’t plan on studying at all.

Hearing that the person who ranked first in the midterms decided to more or less throw the finals made her eyes go round.

* * *

There were rumors that believers of the Demon Gods’ Church and Revolutionary Forces were hiding inside Temple.

I was unsure whether the believers were really here, but Charlotte seemed positive that there were members of the Revolutionary Forces somewhere in the school

If one spent a long time in Temple's special environment, one would inevitably accumulate useless pride and dissatisfaction with the status system itself. It was a place where commoners could see people who were much dumber and inferior to them, although those people were nobles in society and looked down on them

condescendingly in the wider world.

I'm so much better than that piece of trash, yet they are supposed to be superior to me just because of the parents they got born to?

Those were the thoughts that were bound to appear in a place structured like Temple.

However, there were no events in the original novel in which conflict between the main cast and the believers of the Demon Gods' Church and the Revolutionary Forces happened inside Temple.

After all, they either didn't have an important role right until the end of the story or only existed outside of the main story.

Anyway, whoever they might be, they were probably only petty threats because, in the future, there would be one big event that would devour all the small ones.

After our common classes on Thursday, Charlotte and I met at a cafe near the class building.

"I hate… Swimming…"

"Should we put it off for today?"

Charlotte shook her head at my words.

Her blond hair draped over the table like the tentacles of a jellyfish and fluttered along with her movements.

"It'll be like this every day… If we decide to put it off today, we'll never get to it…"

PE would always be the last of our common classes.

So, after the day's swimming class, Charlotte could only lie on top of the table like that and mutter.

There was my kidnapping incident and other things, but in the end, what prevented us from doing anything was the much harsher PE classes, our swimming classes, to be specific.

Monday's common classes (Swimming) → Charlotte's physical strength got completely depleted, so she would be out of order for two days → Thursday's common classes (Swimming) → Charlotte would be out of order for the whole weekend → Monday's common classes (Swimming) → Completely exhausted.

Because of this infinite loop, Charlotte was always left completely exhausted.

Of course, those swimming classes and her daily morning training together with Scarlett would be a big reason why Charlotte couldn't replenish her stamina.

Still, she was quite harsh to her own body. One couldn't get a lot better after just a few months, but I believe that her stamina had improved quite a bit by then.

Of course, the after-effects of being kidnapped by the Demon King seemed to last quite long as well.

Charlotte laboriously lifted her head and took a sip of her lemonade.

Sometimes, she really looked just like a doll.

"Siiigh…"

At some point, I just went to meet Charlotte without even thinking about Bertus. I had no idea what Bertus was thinking about it all, but it didn't seem like he planned on causing me any harm.

To be honest, if I cared too much about what Bertus might think, I wouldn't be able to do anything while living in Temple. I was just trying to make things work, somehow.

I figured I was part of Class A and that I was rather capable, so Bertus would need me in the future. I just decided to do what I wanted to do while still walking a tightrope.

We weren't alone in that spacious cafe; some of our seniors were also there.

"By the way… how do we even find those who believe in the Demon Gods in all of Temple…?"

Right when Charlotte was about to begin her investigation, it seemed like we had

already hit our first roadblock. It seemed like she wanted to look for the believers of the Demon Gods' Church first rather than the Revolutionary forces.

"Did you find out anything?"

"Hmm… If there was anything suspicious, it would've already reached my ears, but there was nothing like that. I mean, if there even are any of them here, they would be a small, hidden group."

In the end, she was searching for a needle in a haystack on the premise that this needle was actively trying to hide.

Charlotte and I were sitting by the window, so we could see all the people passing by through the glass.

-Huh?

"!"

-Reinhardt!

"Ah, shit."

So, naturally, I ended up making eye contact with a particular passer-by.

"…What's the matter?"

Charlotte tilted her head, wondering why I was acting like that all of a sudden.

Ah.

I saw someone I really didn't want to meet right then. The person I made eye contact with boldly entered the store, whereas others would have just gone on their way.

"Reinhardt! It has been a while, hasn't it?"

The one I made eye contact with was Olivia Lanze, the 5th year who had told everyone that she would marry me after I graduated and that no one should lay hands on me.

* * *

Olivia Lanze wasn't on her own.

She was together with Ceres van Owen, another fifth-year student (and the student council president).

"…Why did you come here?"

"Why, how could I just pretend not to know my most beloved junior?"

-Rub, rub

Olivia sat very close to me, hugged me, and rubbed my cheek.

"H-hey, don't…"

"Why- Don't I smell good?"

"Please… Go away."

"Hehe, I guess this is a bit much for you, huh? You're a man as well, after all, right?"

"Please…"

'Don't do this to me, lady!'

Not only Charlotte, but the student council president who came with her, looked a little shocked seeing Olivia's frivolous behavior.

What Charlotte's expression showed: *What the hell is this?*

What the student council president's expression showed: *Why did she become like this?*

That was what I thought their expressions meant, at least.

"Oh, the Princess was also here. Hello, my name is Olivia Lanze, a fifth-year student."

"Ah, I see. Feel free to call me Charlotte… I heard a lot about you."

Charlotte's face held a bizarre expression seeing the weird actions and personality of the person in front of her.

"A lot? What did you hear about me? Did Reinhardt talk about me?"

This immediately piqued Olivia's interest.

Why did she have to keep making those kinds of comments?!

"…No. I didn't hear about you from Reinhardt but from other sources…"

"Oh, is that so?"

Olivia, on the other hand, just stared at me as if she was completely uninterested in what Charlotte had to say.

"Reinhardt, why aren't you telling others about me?"

"And why the hell should I talk to others about you, my senior?!"

"Why? You have to tell others that I'll be your future wife. Isn't that something to be proud of?"

"Why would I say that?!"

It was really hard to deal with her.

I felt like I was about to go crazy!

When I said that, Olivia glanced at Charlotte opposite of her and smiled darkly.

'What's with her?'

'So she could make a face like that as well?'

"Hey, Reinhardt, there were rumors going around in Temple that said you had a lot of girls around you, right?"

"And whose fault do you think this is?!"

It was because she was flirting with me so aggressively that I landed in all that mess with that newspaper club!

“Looks like I have a lot of formidable rivals. I thought things would be easy.”

No matter if Olivia was a senior, it was still the Imperial Princess she was staring at, she even looked a bit mischievous.

Rivals?

It might seem that way.

However, why would a Princess want to marry a beggar? Wasn’t that basically a crime?

After she abandoned her saint title, she always went too far. Charlotte was puzzled by Olivia’s provocative gaze.

"????"

‘What kind of reaction should I have to this treatment?’

Charlotte’s brain seemed to have completely shut down.

* * *

“Reinhardt is my friend.”

Charlotte spoke calmly after she regained her composure.

“Oh, really? That’s good then.”

Olivia leaned even closer to me as if she had just gotten permission to do so. Seeing that, Charlotte only smiled subtly.

"He isn’t just a mere friend… he’s my precious friend.”

“…Huh?”

"So I would ask you to not trouble my friend any further.”

At Charlotte's polite request, Olivia seemed to ponder for a bit, pouted, and let go of me.

I was really about to go crazy.

I disliked Olivia's frivolous behavior the most.

"Reinhardt, you sure are popular, aren't you?"

Charlotte looked at me with a subtle smile decorating her lips. I felt a chill run down my spine for some reason.

W-what…?

What's going on?

Was I wrong, or was there a subtle war of nerves going on between Olivia and Charlotte? Was I just being delusional? Charlotte only cared about Valier, right? Although that was also me. Urg.

"I'm sorry, Charlotte. The president usually isn't like this. She only acts this rude if it concerns Reinhardt. I hope you can accept this as an apology."

"Thank you."

The student council president brought over drinks and desserts to the table and sat down.

'When the hell did she order all this?'

"I'm not acting rude; I'm just expressing my affection, Ceres."

"That's why I'm saying you're being rude."

Charlotte tilted her head when she heard the word 'president' come out of her mouth.

"But aren't you the president?"

She was puzzled as to why Ceres, who was the student council president, called

someone else president.

“Ah, she is the president of the club I’m part of.”

The president of the president. Olivia raised her shoulders in pride.

“Hmpf! I’m also Reinhardt’s president!”

“…I didn’t sign up for the club, though.”

“You’re a quasi-member!”

‘Who decided that!’

“Reinhardt, you’re in a club?”

“No, no… I only went there once.”

Seeming as if she had never heard of that before, Charlotte gazed at Olivia this time.

“Which club is it?”

“It’s a religious club. Its name is Grace. Of course, I’m not a believer anymore, though!”

A religious club’s president being a non-believer…

“Ah… That’s what it was.”

It seemed that Charlotte knew a bit about the religious club, but it seemed hard to believe that someone like that was its president. The incident with Olivia Lanze was quite well known in Temple, so Charlotte shouldn’t be unaware of that information either.

Did Charlotte not know why Olivia Lanze was acting like that towards me? I knew that Bertus knew, but what about Charlotte?

“By the way, what were you talking about? Something about Reinhardt’s crush? So were you talking about me?”

“We were talking about the Demon Gods’ Church.”

As soon as Olivia started to make stupid comments again, Charlotte completely batted them away.

In that instant, Olivia’s and Ceres’s expressions stiffened.

CHAPTER 143

“The Demon Gods’ Church?”

Ceres looked at me as she asked Charlotte.

I obviously remember that there had been a senior talking about the Demon Gods’ Church when I visited Grace. At that time, Ceres gave everyone a strong warning to not talk about it so carelessly when outside.

She probably looked at me like that while interrogating Charlotte because she thought I had told her the details.

Of course, I hadn’t.

“A while ago, I stopped by the newspaper club called Royal Class monthly or Monthly Royal Class or something. Among the articles they released in previous issues, there was an article about rumors about believers of the Demon Gods’ Church being in Temple.”

“…Ah, the monthly newspaper of the Royal Class?”

“Yes.”

Charlotte hadn’t gotten that information from me but from the members of the newspaper club.

When Ceres confirmed that I wasn’t the source, she looked at me rather apologetically and then frowned.

“I told them to not spread useless rumors…”

Ceres sighed as if dumbfounded.

Except for the article that covered me, it seemed rather clear that no one was reading that monthly newspaper. It seemed like that was her first time hearing about that article.

Of course, Charlotte wouldn't just let go of the matter.

"Do you know anything?"

"Ah… No, I don't… know anything about that."

Ceres did know something, but she didn't want to reveal anything, which was obvious. She had previously said that if we talked about the Demon Gods' Church carelessly, people might get severely punished or even die.

Since the Imperial Princess was digging about this matter, it was clear that the student council president wouldn't want to tell us anything else.

"Hmm…"

Of course, Charlotte didn't seem to believe her.

"Ceres, there's no point in hiding this from them."

However, before Charlotte could even say anything, Olivia opened her mouth.

"Pre-president! What are you talking about!"

It seemed that not only Ceres knew something about it, but Olivia as well.

"Don't underestimate the Princess; if we don't tell her, she'll find out through some other means."

"…"

Even if they hid it, the Princess would find a way to get to the bottom of it. It was completely meaningless to hide anything from us. Ceres's face turned red as she immediately got caught lying in front of the Imperial Princess.

"I know what you're worried about, so I don't really mind that you lied… As long as you tell me what you know."

Charlotte seemed to have roughly guessed that Ceres was worried about innocent people getting taken in by some inquisitors and ending up dying.

As Olivia already revealed that she knew, Ceres just sighed, wrote something down on a notepad, and handed it over to us.

“Here, it’s really not such a big deal, so you don’t have to worry about it.”

Exodium

That was what Ceres wrote down on the note.

* * *

After Ceres and Olivia left, we just sat quietly in the cafe.

"This really seems like nothing, but it’s incredibly suspicious.”

Of course, we had been told some bizarre information about the club.

“They only get together on Saturday nights, and—except for the president—the members don’t know each other’s identities.”

Club activities were often held during weekends, but club members of any club would also usually meet up during the week as well.

It was incredibly suspicious. It was supposed to be nothing? Even if they weren’t believers of the Demon Gods’ Church, they could easily be misunderstood as some.

[Exodium]

That seemed to be the name of this club that got misunderstood as part of the Demon Gods’ Church by a great number of people.

It gave off the strong impression of a closed-off secret society.

It had been said that the club's purpose was to ‘study special phenomena’, but I didn’t know what ‘special phenomena’ was supposed to be.

There were just too many suspicious points about that club.

“They aren’t accepting any new members… so we have to disguise ourselves as one of their members.”

Charlotte seemed to think that there wouldn't be any reason not to infiltrate it, as it was very suspicious. It seemed like she was already planning on how to investigate the club.

"I could ask the Temple student council president to give me their roster, but… That would be a bit daunting."

"Why?"

"Even if I'm the Imperial Princess, I'm just an ordinary student in Temple, so I have no authority to order around Temple's student council president. Of course, I could put pressure on them, but in doing so, other problems might occur if we anger them."

Since matters regarding clubs were under the Temple's student council's management, teachers weren't allowed to touch that information carelessly. Even Ceres wouldn't be able to get their roster, as it was a regular school club, not a club of Royal Class.

In fact, Ceres had told me that she had heard "from Temple's student council president" that the club wasn't anything dangerous. In the end, Ceres didn't investigate the club personally.

So, Charlotte wouldn't have any justification whatsoever for asking Temple's student council president to hand her that roster. Temple students were granted autonomy, so such an event would show that the Imperial Family was infringing on that.

Therefore, if we angered the president of Temple's student council, they would end up in a big conflict with Charlotte right then and there. They were the student council president of more than 100,000 students, so they had more than enough justification and the right to do so.

Anyway, it wasn't like she couldn't do anything about it, but it wouldn't end well. The president seemed to respect the autonomy of that club called Exodium.

I crossed my arms and sighed.

"You say it isn't anything suspicious? There's hardly anything that is *not* suspicious about them."

"That's what I'm saying…"

It was impossible to just join and spy on them. It was rather unlikely that it would be seen as reasonable to ask for their roster and look through the club's members.

"Based on what we found out, they'll have a gathering somewhere in the club building on Saturday night, right?"

Charlotte nodded at what I said.

"Then how about we just go there and eavesdrop on them?"

I grinned.

"I have pretty good ears."

My hearing enhancement should be enough to eavesdrop on what they were discussing in there.

* * *

Friday passed, and then it was Saturday.

"Are you ready?"

The sun had already set, so the two of us got ready to leave. Both Charlotte and I were wearing hooded capes.

It had been said that Exodium's club room was located in Temple, which had a building exclusive for clubs. Since that building was used by more than 100,000 Temple students for their club activities, it was probably rather big. However, I had never come across it.

Charlotte and I got on the tram and headed to the club building. It was late at night, so most of the tram passengers were staff members with only a handful of students.

"I sure hope this is nothing, like the seniors said."

"It should be."

There were more than one or two clubs that seemed rather suspicious. The best-case scenario would be that the club was harmless.

If they were found out to be real worshippers of the Demon Gods, the club and Temple's student council president would have to be held accountable.

The tram soon came to a halt in front of a cluster of club buildings. Charlotte seemed slightly surprised as she saw the club buildings occupying a large area.

"Hmm… I don't think that club will be the only one that holds their club activities at night, right?"

"I know."

There were some sports-related clubs that practiced at night, so there were quite a few students practicing in the stadium, which was flooded in light.

In fact, I could see many rooms inside the club buildings with their lights turned on. I even heard singing and the sound of instruments getting played from some places.

There were many people passionate not only about their life at Temple, but also their hobbies. I know I'd that Temple is a vast place, but my main focus usually lay on the Royal Class, and I hardly described anything about outside clubs and such.

Therefore, that scene was like some additional setting I had never planned out.

It was a really strange feeling.

"Supposedly, Exodium is located on the third story of that building over there."

Charlotte pointed towards one of the buildings and walked towards one that looked similar to our class building.

"Do you see them?"

"Yeah."

As the time for Exodium's club activity drew nearer, we could vaguely make out some students in robes entering the building.

"Hmm…"

Charlotte seemed like she was thinking about something as she looked at those

figures covered in robes.

“What’s the matter?”

"Hm? N-no, it’s just… I thought that all of them looked so small.”

As Charlotte said, the people wearing these black robes, hiding their appearances, actually seemed pretty small.

The place was a three-story building, structured similarly to our class building, but it somehow seemed completely different as well—perhaps because it was one of the club buildings. Not only were miscellaneous unidentifiable pieces of furniture lined up in the hallway, but each door had the name of a club written next to it.

It was one of the places some of the 100,000 people pursuing their hobbies gathered, so it was only natural that there were multiple buildings and that their interiors were kind of messy wasn’t really surprising either. Some people were definitely pursuing their club activities at night, but things seemed a lot calmer than they would be during the day.

Charlotte and I went to the second floor, not the third.

We planned to eavesdrop on them from right below Exodium’s clubroom.

Fortunately, there weren’t any club members present in that second-floor room.

"I think it’s nearly time… How is it? Can you hear any sounds?”

I could hear that people were gradually gathering above us. I could clearly hear footsteps around the hallway above.

-Black.

-Trumpet.

I heard something like a conversation.

A short one made up of only single words.

After a while, I heard the exact same words.

-Black.

-Trumpet.

Since the conversation had been repeated twice, I had an idea about what they were doing.

“…What are those bastards up to?”

I was speechless, and Charlotte looked at me, wondering what had happened.

“They are using passwords or something."

“…Passwords?”

Black, Trumpet.

Those guys made passwords for some simple club?

At the word ‘password’, Charlotte also went speechless for a bit.

“I can’t hear anything from that room. I don’t think they are talking.”

Not only that, but they didn’t seem to utter even a single word during that gathering. Whenever a person went in, I could only hear the password back-and-forth.

It was already past the time their activities were supposed to start. I could no longer hear anyone say the password again.

“…I can’t hear anything anymore.”

Charlotte tilted her head at my words.

“They gathered together but aren’t saying anything?”

‘It’s been a while, but they aren’t talking? What’s the meaning of this?’

Charlotte didn’t seem to understand.

However, that wasn’t it.

"…No, I don't think it's like that."

I didn't know how many people were already in the room beforehand, but I did hear the password conversation five times.

That meant that there were at least five people in there.

"There are more than six people in there, but I can't hear anything… no dragging of chairs or even a cough."

There was no sound at all coming from the direction I presumed the club room to be at.

"…I think they cast noise canceling magic on that room."

It was clear that they had cast something like that on the room to prevent any of their conversations from leaking out.

"What?"

'Why the hell did no one find this suspicious?'

Charlotte's expression distorted.

CHAPTER 144

They used passwords to enter and cast noise canceling magic on the room. That club called Exodium was filled to the brim with suspicious things.

“Could it be that the student council president is also involved in this club?”

“That’s a possibility. The Royal Class’ student council president also said that there shouldn’t be any problem with this group, but she clearly didn’t know the truth.”

I nodded at Charlotte's valid doubts. I didn’t know who Temple’s student council president was, but why were they covering for such a suspicious club?

Charlotte and I were in the hallway just downstairs from the club room where those guys were doing who-knows-what. We were thinking about how we could find out what they were doing there.

“I could just open their door and ask them what’s going on, but…”

Charlotte seemed to be contemplating some rather risky methods. Since eavesdropping had become impossible, we had to come up with some other method, but would they fess up just because we asked them?

Such a method would be rather extreme, after all.

“We could wait for them to finish their activities and then grab one of them and make them spit it out.”

I came up with another risky one. They wouldn’t stay in there forever; after all, they were bound to come out eventually. If we caught one of them and interrogated them, we would easily find out what that club Exodium was up to.

“Hmm… In the end, both of these methods involve violence, so we should prepare to receive disciplinary actions if this really is nothing.”

I nodded at Charlotte’s words. Disciplinary actions would be fine as long as they didn’t involve expulsion. I had already been branded as a troublemaker anyway.

Charlotte and I leaned against the window at the end of the second floor's hallway, thinking about what we should do.

"…I guess they weren't at capacity yet."

"What?"

Charlotte pointed out the window.

There was a student covered in a black robe walking into the building. A late student, sure enough…

'No, wait a minute.'

*"…*Come to think of it, didn't they say that the members don't know each other?"

"…Yes, what about it?"

The student council president said that they didn't know each other personally because they wore robes at their gatherings.

"Why don't I just go instead of that guy?"

"Ah…"

I already knew the password after eavesdropping.

"No. There's too big a height difference. You'll definitely get caught. Additionally, the president of the club surely memorized that person's voice."

"Can't I just say that I recently recovered from a cold or something?"

"…Do you think the president who even went so far as to use passwords for his club would believe that?"

Charlotte's attitude was rather negative towards my undercover infiltration plan. In the end, the best decision I could come up with in that situation was catching one of their guys after their club activities were over.

-Clack

And then both Charlotte and I saw a door to the second-floor hallway on the far side opening up.

I didn't care if we were seen by people, as long as they weren't the guys from the third floor.

However, as Charlotte saw that person coming into the hallway, she tilted her head.

"…Isn't that Detto?"

He was still far away, but I could still recognize him.

It was Number B-8, Dettomolian.

* * *

B-9, Dettomolian, his talents were witchcraft and supernatural abilities.

Along with Scarlett, he was one of the people that most of Class B avoided. Of course, thanks to Charlotte's protection, Scarlett was no longer bullied, but it didn't seem that they had much contact with Dettomolian yet.

He was the type that people felt reluctant to get close to—a creepy and eerie aura surrounded him.

His hair was always messy, dark circles framed his eyes, and he was as skinny as a stick and seemed like a dried anchovy.

Scarlett was labelled an outcast just because, but Dettomolian… he actually makes you feel uncomfortable. It was that kind of deal.

In fact, he would often see ghosts and say some really creepy things.

Why was he there at that hour?

"Detto!"

Of course, Charlotte, who was sweet and kind to most—except for Bertus—immediately ran down the hallway as if she was pleased to see Dettomolian and called out to him.

What did she mean by ‘Detto’? Was that his nickname?

…She never called me such cute nicknames.

“…Charlotte.”

When Charlotte called out to him, Dettomolian moved his dried, skinny body to look at her.

“I was wondering why you left every weekend at night. Are you in a club?”

“…Yes.”

Charlotte tended to look at people with gentle eyes, smiling as if she didn’t feel an ounce of discomfort. I approached him because Charlotte was there, but that was kind of creepy in a different sense.

“What club are you in?”

-Point

Dettomolian pointed towards the door he came out of instead of answering.

[Occult Research Department]

It was kind of obvious that it would be that kind of club.

I once again realized that the members of Class B, who weren’t part of the main cast, were busy doing various things outside of the story that I had no idea about. Dettomolian definitely wasn’t among the guys that got close to Ludwig in his first year.

He was just the slightly creepy kid of the class.

After having such a ghost-like presence in the story, he would later gain some more weight in it.

“Ah. Tha-that’s right…”

As Charlotte saw the sign of the Occult Research Department, she let out an awkward

laugh.

Although I always kind of thought it when I saw him, facing him like that sure felt like seeing a living skeleton. Wasn't he eating well? How was he even able to successfully go through Temple's strength training?

No, it was also my fault.

It was clear that his constitution didn't allow him to gain much weight because I set him up to be the skinniest anchovy there was.

I'm sorry, my friend.

He slowly dragged his skinny body towards the bathroom. He was someone who took care of his needs first, no matter if the Princess stood before him or not.

It was nigh impossible to guess what he was thinking, and he always did things at his own pace.

That was the type of guy Dettomolian was.

"Hey, wouldn't Detto know about this?"

Why did Charlotte call him by that nickname?

Why was I getting annoyed for no reason? Was I jealous?

Of course, Charlotte didn't seem to have any particular reason behind it.

Anyway, Charlotte's question of whether Dettomolian knew about the suspicious club was quite valid, as they had their clubrooms in the same building.

"Let's ask him."

"Ok."

Soon, he came back from the bathroom.

"Detto, do you have some time? Could we talk for a bit?"

"…"

The guy answered with silence before pointing towards the clubroom.

I thought he meant that we should talk inside the room.

"…Are there any other club members around? Won't we get in the way?"

He shook his head at Charlotte's words.

"…I'm alone."

He was doing his club activities all on his own.

The club's research topic was the occult.

"I-I-is that so?"

Charlotte and I felt a slight chill run down our spines.

* * *

-*Clack*

Charlotte and I followed after Dettomolian, who opened the door to the Occult Research Department.

"Uhmm…"

All lights were turned off, and the dark curtains were drawn, even though it was already night.

The only light source in the room was a single candle placed in the middle of the room. Something like a circle was drawn around the candle.

It definitely didn't look like a magic circle… it somehow seemed too hideous to be one.

It seemed to be drawn with something red, but that surely wasn't blood, right?

“Hey, it’s a little too dark. Can I turn the lights on?” Charlotte asked cautiously.

“…Then the ceremony would be over.”

He didn’t explain just what he was doing there. Charlotte’s lips began to tremble slightly.

He didn’t say what kind of ceremony he was holding or whether we could turn on the lights or not.

If you want to talk about it, then explain everything, you bastard!

I couldn’t even tell him that because I was afraid that I’d get cursed if I touched him.

…Ah.

Wasn’t I acting just like Erich, who had bullied poor little Scarlett because he thought she was cursed?

Let’s not be prejudiced… Let’s not be prejudiced… Let’s not be prejudiced… I’m an adult.

“So… So you’re saying I shouldn’t, right?”

“…It doesn't matter. I can just do it again later. It took about a week, though…”

"A-as I thought, I shouldn’t…”

I wasn’t exactly sure, but it seemed that Charlotte gave up on the idea of turning on the lights, thinking that if she turned on the wrong lights, Dettomolian’s week-long hard work would get completely ruined.

Before sitting down in front of the candle, he dragged some chairs close to it.

“…Sit here."

Maybe because the atmosphere in the room was just too eerie or maybe because of his words, a strange feeling of fear crept up, telling me that something bad would happen if I sat anywhere else but there.

“O-ookay…”

Charlotte.

I could read her exact thoughts at that moment.

She probably also thought that the occult research department, which only Dettomolian was part of, was a lot more suspicious than that Exodium, right?

Charlotte and I sat exactly where Dettomolian told us to sit.

“Are you… The only club member?”

“Although I’m recruiting members… No one is joining.”

Like hell anyone was gonna join, you punk!

That place… beyond just feeling eerie, it actually felt like something would pop out at any moment.

Just looking at those strange tools illuminated by that single candle gave me goosebumps.

It seemed like Dettomolian had created the club on his own. Keeping that in mind, Charlotte had another question to ask him that didn’t pertain to the creepy atmosphere in the place.

“Well… Can you actually create a club by yourself, though? Wasn’t it required to gather at least a certain number of people first…?”

Yeah. It should have been impossible to create a club all alone. There should be a requirement of a minimum number of members, right?

“…I can.”

Charlotte tilted her head at his bizarre words when he told us that he could do it while no one else could.

“…Temple… Can’t teach me witchcraft… so I self-study here… This is just like… my private study room…”

“Aah… Certainly…”

Charlotte nodded her head, seemingly having understood his reasons.

I wasn't all that familiar with Dettomolian, but I had described him in the novel.

His talents lay in witchcraft and supernatural abilities, but Temple had no curricula related to witchcraft because it was like a super ancient type of magic that wasn't really practiced anymore. Dettomolian didn't actually have to go to Temple, but he still did to comfortably study and research his magic with the school's support.

Hence, Temple let him create the club for his own convenience to study his witchcraft. They couldn't teach him, so they just let him self-study as his major.

That was why he could create a club while being the only club member.

…Dettomolian didn't get taught how to use his type of magic, but later on, he would still manage to use it very skillfully. I didn't give any reason for that whatsoever, so this background setting that he self-studied in the one-person club was created.

However, it wasn't one of Royal Class' internal clubs, but a general one…

He wanted to have more members. It was pretty much impossible to secure any more members from the Royal Class, as there was only a very limited number of students.

It seemed pretty much impossible to gain any more members because of the research topic of this club and what he was actually doing. It seemed pretty serious as well.

If someone went along with that guy, a ghost might really pop up one day. He might even end up saying something like, " And that's how you do it. It might be a bit dangerous now."

"B-but… Does that mean you're trying to call a real… ghost?"

Wasn't it much more dangerous that someone was trying to summon real ghosts on campus rather than those who might be believers of the Demon Gods' Church?

Charlotte seemed to seriously contemplate whether she should shift her focus on that place instead Exodium or not.

“Ghosts are everywhere already… I’m not calling them… It feels more like they are already here…”

“!”

“!”

“That’s why… Calling would be the wrong word…”

Ah, I felt like I was about to go crazy…

“Of course… It’s not necessarily wrong either… Because this ritual… makes them flock to this place…”

There were already a lot of ghosts around us; however, Charlotte and I couldn’t see or feel them.

At that moment, Charlotte grabbed my hand gently.

“!”

I guess she grabbed it unconsciously, as she seemed more surprised than me and immediately let go.

It looked like she got scared.

However, I didn’t know how to fight ghosts either…

I’m actually… really weak against jump scares…

Even in a fantasy world, I felt like I would get a heart attack if I ever came across a real ghost.

Those were the things I hated most in the world…

[You have found out the truth about the Ghosts of Temple.]

[Quest Completed – The Phantom of Temple]

[You have been rewarded 300 achievement points.]

“U-uwark, fuck!”

“Wh-wh-wh-whaaat? What happened?!”

I was so surprised by that quest completion window that I jumped up suddenly.

CHAPTER 145

The Demon Prince goes to the Academy

When I suddenly jumped up like that, Charlotte looked at me, her face completely white, seeming as if her soul was about to leave her body.

“Wh-what’s wrong… Wha-what happened?”

“I-I suddenly saw something go past my eyes just now…”

“Eeek!”

Of course, it wasn’t a ghost that I had seen, but Charlotte’s complexion seemed to go even paler at my words. I didn’t know Charlotte was so afraid of ghosts.

No, even someone who was immune to horror was sure to jump up from their seats in such an eerie place—it was tremendously creepy there.

I was grateful for the achievement points, but that hadn’t just sent me that quest completion announcement like that to scare me, right? If something like that popped out all of a sudden, of course I’d get surprised!

Anyway, while trying to find out the truth about the Demon Gods’ Church, I ended up completing the quest related to ghosts in that strange place.

Ghosts were everywhere. However, we couldn’t perceive them.

The fact that the quest was completed after I heard Dettomolian’s words meant that he was telling the truth.

Ah.

Hehe.

Right.

Ghosts were already everywhere around us, huh?

I wished I didn't know about that, but because I did, I felt like something would pop up behind me if I slept with my back to the windows.

-Shake, shake, shake

"Re-Reinhardt… Calm down."

Charlotte placed her hand on my thigh when she noticed that my legs were shaking quite intensely.

Rather than reassuring her, I had gotten even more scared than her! I got more objective answers to it because of that system message!

"Ghosts… don't usually harm others…"

So you're saying there are situations in which they harm people, you bastard!

Dettomolian.

I felt even more exhausted than I expected to be when we actually ended up talking. I felt I understood why people avoided him… I knew it wasn't his fault, though.

Don't just put the truth others wouldn't want to hear into their brains!

"By the way… There was something you wanted to ask."

"A-ah… Yes, that's right."

Our original purpose was to ask about that club called, Exodium.

However, it felt like we had tried to enter a rat's den to catch some rats but actually found out that a cobra was living there. We had found a place that seemed to be even more dangerous and insidious than Exodium.

"A-above this place… There's a club called Exodium… Do you know about it?"

Still, since we had to do something about our original purpose, Charlotte plucked up her courage and asked him the question. Dettomolian nodded his head at the word

Exodium.

“It’s the place… Upstairs.”

It seemed like he knew because both he and Exodium held their activities at night. Charlotte perked up a bit, thinking that she might get a clue out of him.

“Oh really? Do you know what the members of the club are doing?”

That guy didn’t seem like someone that would be interested in his surroundings, though. I was sure that he didn’t know much about it.

“…I signed up for it.”

“…Huh?”

However, his answer was completely different from what I expected.

* * *

It seemed that Dettomolian was initially trying to find some people that studied in the same field as himself rather than forming a club of his own. There were a lot of clubs, and there were even more people with varied interests, after all.

However, spirits and witchcraft were quite the niche interest, and as he was digging through the list of clubs, it seemed that the club called Exodium caught his eye.

On the surface, the purpose of that club was the ‘Study of special phenomena’, so Dettomolian wouldn’t have had any other choice but to get interested in it.

Witchcraft and spirits could also be seen as special phenomena, after all.

“Their conditions for membership were quite strict… and it was a bit vague, but I was able to sign up…”

I didn’t know how the hell he managed to sign up, but Dettomolian somehow seemed to be a member of the club.

“So? What kinds of activities did you do there?”

"…"

Dettomolian slightly tilted his head to the side as if pondering something.

"They don't research special phenomena… They are just weird kids."

How weird were those guys for *him* to call them weird?

Dettomolian began to explain things about the members.

"See… There are some kids who believe that the power of darkness sleeps within them… There were some who said that they were the reincarnation of dragons but lost their memories… Some said that they were the successors of the Great Devil who rebelled against the heavens and got banished… Those people always fight with some guy who says he's the reincarnation of an angel…"

No.

What?

"…?"

Charlotte seemed a little confused as if she didn't properly understand what he was talking about.

"Anyway… They are just weird…"

I was wondering why those guys were so short…

Wasn't that just a club for middle school students with 8th-grade syndrome, then? Were they role-playing?

Did they cast noise cancellation magic on the room to prevent others from making fun of them for what they were doing?

Charlotte began to organize her thoughts with a puzzled expression on her face.

"So… That club called Exodium is… for people who think they have amazing powers to get together and talk about things concerning their circumstances, but in reality, they are just… How should I put this? Is there a word to express this…?"

“Role-playing.”

“Roleplaying? R-right… Role-playing… That’s what that club is for?”

“…Yes.”

Charlotte’s eyes shook violently as if she felt that what she was talking about was completely absurd.

“Why would they… want to do something like that?”

What’s the matter with them!?

Charlotte didn’t seem to understand why those guys were doing those kinds of things.

“…I don’t know.”

Even Dettomolian didn’t know why they did it—he didn’t have 8th-grade syndrome after all.

N-no, I mean…

Still…

Didn’t they ever think something like ‘…Maybe I’m actually someone special?’ when they were in middle school?

Was it something so bad? Did they never have such thoughts?

Was it just me? Did they really not understand such a manner of thought? Seriously?

Was I actually closer to those Exodium guys than those two…?

“Those kids talk about having the power of darkness and being beings of pure darkness, so there are a lot of rumors that they are believers of the Demon Gods’ Church…”

Charlotte nodded her head blankly as if she finally understood why those absurd accusations of that Exodium club being filled with worshippers of the Demon Gods

became so widespread.

Some of what they were talking about leaked to the outside.

The Exodium members were all kids inflicted with 8th-grade syndrome, so they would sometimes say some strange things about being evil or being an existence of pure darkness, which is why rumors about them being believers of the Demon Gods' Church cropped up.

That was the moment I also realized why Temple's student council president and Royal Class' student council president didn't tell anyone the details about the club and had just said that it was nothing big.

They were trying to protect the integrity of Exodium's members.

They didn't announce it properly because they were afraid that the members get teased if such things were revealed!

Temple's student council president… I didn't know them, but they were actually a good person!

"I feel empty…"

Charlotte had hoped that it would be nothing big; however, since the situation had actually ended up being nothing to worry about, she sighed as if she was disappointed.

The Occult Research Department turned out to be much more dangerous than Exodium.

Anyway…

We confirmed that Exodium was just a trivial club without even having to go in there. I also completed the related quest of finding out the truth behind the rumors, receiving 300 achievement points.

What believers of the Demon Gods' Church?

There were none in Temple at all.

“But why did you leave the club?”

“…When I first went to one of their meetings, they asked me what my hidden power was… So I showed them.”

Ah.

I could already imagine what went down.

“All of them started to cry and go crazy…”

The dark circles around Dettomolian’s eyes cast an even deeper shadow.

The puzzled Charlotte asked another question.

“Wha-what did you show them?”

“…Possession.”

Crazy bastard.

Charlotte’s face went completely pale.

“…Ah. I-I’m just saying this just in case, okay? You don’t have to show me that skill like ever, okay?”

That crazy bastard went to a place filled with people faking madness and showed them what real madness looked like.

For those guys who were just role-playing and saying things like, “I’m a supreme being of darkness, lol,” It wouldn’t be weird that they all ended up peeing their pants after that guy showed them what he could do.

Everyone would have fallen into chaos when they were shown the real thing, so Dettomolian didn’t seem to have gone to Exodium again after that.

Anyway, the truth was revealed. The rumors about the Demon Gods’ Church were completely fake.

“W-well then, Detto… See you at the dorms.”

“Yes… Goodbye…”

However, Charlotte learned about the existence of the Occult Research Department, which seemed to require some countermeasures to be taken against.

* * *

After leaving the club building, Charlotte and I walked towards the tram stop.

“Sigh… I’m glad, but I also feel pretty empty… What is this feeling?”

Charlotte sighed deeply. If there really were believers of the Demon Gods’ Church inside of Temple, that would have been a huge deal, but just like Ceres said, they were nothing more than some role-players.

The older they get, the less they would be afflicted by such mannerisms.

Charlotte was relieved, but she seemed to also feel disappointed and weirded out that it had amounted to nothing more than that.

"Why the hell are they doing such things?”

“W-well…”

Charlotte didn’t seem to understand why people would do something like that, never having heard of something like that her whole life.

She didn’t understand because she had never caught that disease before. I didn't even have such a bad case of it. So what did cause people to get afflicted by the 8th-grade syndrome?

Although I thought about it, I had no clue.

And then my thoughts wandered to a completely different place.

“Hmm… Come to think of it, actually, I think… I heard about those Exodium guys before.”

“You heard of them before?”

When I had listened to what Dettomolian had to say, I remembered where I had heard about people like them.

“Yeah, when I took my supernatural power test… we did some experiments using my power.”

“Aah… Yeah. I know about that.”

I didn’t know what Charlotte’s supernatural power was, but she nodded her head as if she knew what I was talking about. She probably went through a similar test.

“However, the teacher in charge was a little worried about something.”

“Mrs. Rollandria?"

“Yeah.”

Charlotte and I were part of the class taught by Mrs. Rolandria, who was in charge of anything related to supernatural powers. Perhaps she also knew about Charlotte’s supernatural powers.

“Because my ability is self-suggestion… She said that if I was that type of person, things might get really dangerous.”

“Huh? What kind of person was she… Ah.”

After thinking a bit about it, Charlotte’s seemed as if she came to a realization.

“So if you believed that you were some kind of dark being, that’s what you’d become… So-something like that?”

The corners of her mouth twitched as she spoke as if she found it just too bizarre.

No, it didn’t have to be some dark existence, just something really great. That was how it was.

“To be exact, she worried that I would actually become a god if I believed myself to be one… But it was useless to worry about that because my ability didn’t turn out to be so omnipotent.”

“But why would she worry about something like that?"

Mrs. Rollendria had clearly told me about a group like that.

“Well, some kids seriously and wholly believe that they are some great beings… For example, they believe that they are dragons who lost their memories just for the sake of acting out a character… Some kids are just like that.”

She had asked me if I was that type of person because that might have led to a lot of trouble.

‘Well, you know? Sometimes there are some second-year middle school kids who believe they are gods… Seriously… And… if it isn’t gods, it’s some great evil beings… There was one who thought he was a dragon who lost his memories… It’s surprisingly common.’

Mrs. Rollendria had certainly said that.

Charlotte listened to me with her mouth slightly agape.

“Ah… Then what you said…”

“Yeah…”

Teacher… Just what kind of fight had you been fighting in the background?

We headed to the tram stop, praying for Mrs. Rollendria’s mental health. Because it was so late at night, only a few people returned after finishing their club activities.

“…”

“…”

“…”

The silence of three people was permeating the tram station.

One belonged to me.

Another one belonged to Charlotte.

"…"

And the last one belonged to Redina, the small senior.

She was a second-year student with a magic talent.

We didn't exchange any words.

We didn't even act as if we knew each other.

However, when I saw that her face was red with her expression practically begging me not to talk to her…

I knew what went on here.

She was biting her lips, and I could even see some cold sweat on her forehead.

Hm, she had said that she was 15, right?

There were 15-year-olds who'd get afflicted with 8th-grade syndrome, right?

I didn't ask her anything. However, there could only be one reason why she acted like that, right?

Is that what one meant by, "a guilty conscience needs no accuser"?

Right.

They were wearing robes when they went to the gathering, but when they were going back, it would be less suspicious if they just wore casual clothes, so was that why she wasn't wearing it at the moment?

I could see from behind her that there was a piece of black cloth sticking out of her bag.

That made it 100% sure.

As I continued to stare at her, her neck slowly turned towards me, moving like a rusty tin doll.

“J-ju-ju-ju… Junior↗? Uhm! Hmm! Ahem! Hm! W-what are you doing here? So late at night? Is… There something wrong…?”

Redina was on her way back from her club activities, feeling ashamed, then she encountered her junior, who shouldn’t have been there. She must have been thinking something like, “What the hell is he doing here?!”

Put it into other words: it was like meeting a friend from school after coming back from shopping in Akihabara when she was pretending to be a normie in school!

It was a rather awkward situation.

“Oh, you were here, senior. Hello?”

Before I could respond, Charlotte responded to her first.

“A-ah. P-p-priiincess, thi-thiiis is our first me-meeting, isn’t it?! Ni-ni-nice to meet you…”

“…Why are you so nervous?”

“N-no… I-i-it’s nothing.”

What should I do?

To tease her or not to tease.

To tease her or not to tease.

“So, what’s your setting? A Dragon? A Devil?”

The answer was to tease!

Redina almost collapsed.

“Did you maybe start thinking that you were actually a dragon because you have the no-casting ability…?”

“!!!!"

It looked like I hit the nail on the head.

CHAPTER 146

That Dragon role-player I heard Mrs. Rollendria talking about…

They were closer to me than I had thought.

Even though she did nothing wrong, Redina, who had become my prisoner, went back to the Royal Class Dormitory, stuck between Charlotte and me.

Redina didn't say a single thing, and her face was as pale as a ghost's. She didn't even ask me how I had found out.

Her expression seemed to convey that she had no other choice but to die. Charlotte looked at Redina, whose soul seemed to have been sucked out when she heard my words, and then she directed her eyes at me.

Why did you have to say something like that to her!?

Charlotte seemed to admonish me with her eyes.

"…Well, that's just what kids your age do."

"…"

"I was like that too when I was younger! Yeah!"

"…"

No matter how much I comforted her, Redina, who was completely crushed, didn't return to her former self.

"I mean, just Charlotte and I know about this. I'll keep it a secret, I swear, okay?"

Redina was moving like a broken doll. My words didn't seem to reach her ears.

That kid who was smart enough to skip grades actually went to a middle-school club for people with 8th-grade syndrome and did some role-playing. Just imagining that

scene made me burst into laughter.

“P-pfft! Ah, no… Sorry. I-I just laughed because I suddenly felt something tickle me, not because I find this whole thing hilarious…”

“…”

So, even while I was trying to comfort her, a stupid grin kept returning to my face—which had the exact opposite effect on Redina. Charlotte didn’t understand why people would role-play such bizarre things, so she didn’t know how to comfort her either. Hence, she just stood there, frozen.

Upon arriving at Royal Class’ Dormitory entrance, Redina turned her head towards me.

Her face was red, and I could see some tears around her eyes.

“D-don’t… Don’t tell anyone…”

The expression on her face looked so desperate that Charlotte and I had no other choice but to nod our heads. After that, Redina went into the dormitory as if she was running away from us. That was when Charlotte and I made eye contact.

“…I’m tired.”

“Yeah…”

While investigating the rumors about the Demon Gods’ Church’s believers, I came across some completely useless information that one of my seniors had a serious case of 8th-grade syndrome.

* * *

My early morning workout with Adriana was still going on.

However, that day was a bit different from usual.

“Huff… Huff… Huff.”

“…Why are you having such a hard time with this?”

Redina was taking part in Adriana's early morning training with me. Just as all the students with magic talents had a hard time working out, that girl was no different.

However, for some reason, she had decided to go exercise with Adriana.

"Let's take a break. I was surprised when Redina asked me to train with her so suddenly."

We took a short break, sitting on a nearby bench because of Redina, who couldn't keep up with us at all because her physical strength was severely lacking.

Redina stared at me, completely exhausted.

Don't tell her! Don't tell her!

Her eyes kept signaling this at me.

Since she knew that I was doing my morning workout with Adriana, she got worried that I would tell Adriana about the thing I had found out.

I didn't really mean to tell her, but would she still continue to follow us during the workout? Could she even survive that?

"Drink some water, Redina."

"Huff… O-okay… Huff…"

It was clear that none of Redina's classmates knew about her club. So she joined my morning workout to keep an eye on me.

But wasn't she more or less Year 2 Class A's mascot to begin with?

Even if her classmates found out, they probably wouldn't look at her strangely; rather, they would say this trait made her even cuter.

Of course, she herself kept on putting pressure on me with her eyes so that I wouldn't even think about spilling it.

After all, having 8th-grade syndrome wasn't so bad as long as it wasn't so serious.

Most of them knew to some extent that they were just role-playing.

Redina wasn't so deep into her role-play that she needed intervention.

It was only a temporary condition, after all. She would be healed after some time passed.

* * *

There was a problem.

"…"

"Why do you keep following me?!"

Even though I finished my morning training, that kid didn't even think about stopping there. As soon as breakfast was over, she came down to the first floor to monitor me closely.

As it was Sunday, there were no classes, so she watched while I sparred with Ellen and Cliffman in the training room.

"J-just do whatever you usually do. I-I'm just here to watch."

She was sweating so obviously.

If she was going to be that embarrassed by it, why did she join that kind of club?

If she followed me around all Sunday like that, what did she plan on doing the next day?

Eventually, I put down my training sword, grabbed Redina, and dragged her out by her arms. After confirming that no one was in the hallway, I looked down at Redina.

"I'm not the only one who knows your secret. Charlotte also knows, so why are you only chasing after me?"

"I-I don't think the Princess would tell anyone…"

"So you think I'm a cheap bastard that would just blab around, huh?"

“Tha-that’s…! That’s not it…”

It looked like she didn’t believe my words because of what I had done.

It was me, after all, who started teasing her about it. I regret it now. If I knew what a hassle it would be afterwards, I would have just ignored her.

It was all my fault, after all.

"I won’t tell a soul. You get it? I won’t tell anyone, okay? What would I get out of spreading weird rumors about you?”

Redina flinched when she saw me glaring at her.

"And do you actually think it’s such a big deal for others to find out about that? Those kids over there would just say something like, “I see”, and go on with their life if they found out, you know?”

She wasn’t as amazing as she thought she was! My classmates, who bore much greater secrets, wouldn’t be interested in that at all!

Even if they found out that their second-year senior was a role-playing junkie who believed herself to be a dragon, anyone would have a period in their lives where they thought something like that.

There wasn’t much to it.

…Except for that, it was incredibly weird. Ah.

“Re-really… You won’t tell anyone?”

Redina looked up at me with a desperate expression on her face. Usually, I’d say it was cute, but it seemed more annoying than cute at that moment.

‘Just get lost, kid!’

“I won’t tell anyone, okay?"

Redina stared at me for a long while before she nodded and put on a warmer expression.

“W-well then… L-let’s talk for a bit…”

After promising to keep a secret, that should be the end of it, so what was there to talk about?

* * *

Eventually, after my training was over, Redina and I headed towards the park near the dormitory.

"The only ones who know about this are… You and the Princess, right?”

Exodium was an anonymous club, so the members didn’t know each other’s identities; they only knew their settings.

"Doesn’t your club president know?”

Didn’t the club’s president know every Exodium member’s identity? At my question, Redina turned red.

“…I’m the president.”

“Ah…”

So she wasn’t just a regular member but had made that den herself. That little Redina, who skipped some classes, seemed to do a lot of strange things. Her face was completely red.

“A… Actually. I know this is nonsense. I also know that the members are exaggerating a bit when we gather… But everyone knows that we all gather together for fun…”

Redina also acknowledged that her club was a place where a bunch of role-players gathered, but why was she telling me this?

Redina was fidgeting with her fingers as if she was trying to tell me something that she found pretty difficult to say.

“W-well, see… I’ve been seriously thinking things like… Aren’t I really a dragon?… things like that.”

"…?"

What was she saying?

My mind went pure static at her sudden words.

Had she already surpassed the stage of role-playing? Of course, she seemed to be aware that her thoughts were a little strange. She wasn't proclaiming it proudly, after all.

She didn't seriously think that she was a dragon but still seriously questioned whether she actually was one. Wasn't that an incredibly strange thought to have? Did she have a severe case as well as a minor one?

Was it even 8th-grade syndrome that she was afflicted with?

Redina's face was so red that it seemed like even her tears would turn red if this went on. She seemed to know that what she was saying was ridiculous and nonsensical.

Of course, I could also see that she was pretty serious about it in her own way.

She seemed to be really struggling with that idea. She wasn't just joking around or role-playing.

At her gatherings, she would probably say something along the lines of, "I'm a dragon lol", but she seemed to seriously want to consult with me about it.

Of course, the topic of the consultation was, "I think I'm a dragon." Any normal counseling wouldn't be possible at such a point.

"What the hell made you think like that?"

"…This."

Redina stretched out her hand and summoned sparks, lightning, and some wind. The ability to realize magic spells without casting.

No casting.

That was Redina's talent.

"They say… Dragons can use magic without casting."

Dragons could skip the casting phase and immediately use magic, so she was wondering if she was a dragon as well.

"…That's a supernatural power."

"N-no. I was told it was unclear whether this was a magic-related talent or a supernatural power."

That was what Redina had explained to me before. It was a magic-related talent, but at the same time, it was also a supernatural power, an ability not even Temple knew about.

It did seem that calling it a supernatural power related to magic seemed a bit vague—it was a supernatural power that wouldn't manifest unless one learned magic.

"A-also, it's said that one awakens supernatural powers when one is put in a difficult situation. It wasn't like that for me. Just… as soon as I learned magic, I could just use it without casting."

In most cases, supernatural powers awakened in extreme situations, but there were exceptions to that rule. In Liana's case, she could naturally use her supernatural powers. Did Redina also make up such an exception?

Redina seemed to doubt that her no-casting ability was a supernatural power but was instead a racial characteristic of a dragon.

However, just because of a single thing, she suddenly started to believe that she was a dragon?

"Is that it? You don't have a lot of mana, right, senior? Dragons should have a really large magic pool, right?"

Putting no-casting aside, ff she was a dragon, she would have a lot of magical power, but she seemed to be worried about her low amount of it.

"Tha-that's… Maybe my power got sealed away… or something…"

Redina crawled to a whisper, knowing that what she was saying didn't have much persuasive power behind it.

She seriously seemed to wonder whether she was a dragon who lost all her memories.

If one started to believe in things just for the sake of believing, then there was no limit. Once she thought that she was a dragon and started to put some things together, everything would just end up making sense to her.

She should have gotten this self-suggestion power, not me. With that kind of thinking, she might even be able to change her race into an actual dragon if she had it.

"What about your parents?"

If the parents who gave birth to Redina were around, then there was no possibility that she was a dragon.

Both of her parents would have to be dragons, then.

"…I came from an orphanage."

Redina spoke in a slightly gloomy voice.

"Uhm, sorry…"

"No, you said you were the same, right? Anyway, I don't really remember who my parents were."

Redina's birth was unclear.

It was also unclear whether her power was a supernatural power or not.

Only these very weak hints made Redina think that she was a dragon. She seemed to explain her lack of magical power with a type of seal put on her body.

It was utter nonsense.

“I know you must think that this is ridiculous. But…”

“Ah, then you might be a dragon.”

“!”

Her pieces of evidence were poor, and her logic was insufficient.

“Y-you believe me?”

“Who said that? I only said that it might be possible that you are.”

However, I kind of thought that her bizarre delusions might be true.

Was she really a dragon?

Redina seemed to be happy when I said that she might be right, rather than making fun of her or ridiculing her.

“I-I thought… You would make fun of me…”

Redina muttered with her face slightly red. She certainly held quite baseless beliefs, but she seemed to have prepared quite a bit and plucked up all her courage and determination to confess those things to me.

"Thank you, junior…”

Whether she actually was a dragon or not wasn’t important.

“No, I didn’t acknowledge you’re a dragon, okay? I just heard what you said and thought that maybe there was a tiny possibility that you’re right.”

“Yes…”

Simply because I seriously listened to Redina, she seemed to have been moved.

Later, I heard from Eleris that it was impossible to find out whether Redina was a dragon or not if she really had lost all her memories.

Of course, Eleris affirmed that dragons were monsters that only existed in legends.

CHAPTER 147

We were able to find out the truth behind the rumors of the Demon Gods' Church, but we found nothing on the Revolutionary Forces. We were pressed for time. And—because of how our last investigation had ended—Charlotte seemed to think that even if there was some truth to those rumors, it wouldn't be anything serious.

Redina treated me quite friendly whenever we saw each other. She seemed to be quite grateful that I had listened to her to the end without making fun of her ridiculous story.

"These are the results of the final exam. Please check over them."

The final exam period was finally over.

1st – Ellen

2nd – Louis Ankton

3rd – Bertus de Gardias

…

7th – Harriet de Saint-Owan

8th – Reinhardt

Since I didn't study, my grades obviously fell. Still, 8th place wasn't all that bad. It was almost right in the middle, right?

Everyone stared at me when they saw that the former first-place fell to eighth place. All of them were wondering if my luck had run out.

"Yeah, there's no way someone like him could study well."

That was what those who hated me probably thought.

“Hah! Last time you made fun of me for being placed eighth, but this time you’re in eighth place! I won, right?”

Harriet probably remembered that I had teased her after our midterms, so when she saw that her grades were better, she immediately returned the favor.

“Wow, you remembered that? What a petty person you are, oh Grand Duchess.”

“What? Pe-pe… Petty?"

“Yeah, you small-minded idiot.”

“Small-minded?! Did you just call me a small-minded idiot?”

“Hey.”

“E-eek! J-just admit that you aren’t good at studying!”

“It’s not that I’m not good at it; I didn’t do it to begin with. If I had studied, I would have beaten you easily. Oh, and did you know? Taking the mid-term exam into consideration, your score average is still lower than mine, you know? Huh? Didn’t you lose again, then?”

“Tha-that… can’t be…”

For our midterms, I got ranked first, and for the finals, I got ranked eighth while she got ranked seventh.

Harriet’s overall score for the first semester was irrefutably lower than mine. When I informed her of that fact, Harriet’s complexion turned pale.

She tried to tease me, thinking that she had won while she actually lost.

Harriet always ended up taking a hit when she tried arguing with me. I didn’t even dislike it anymore, and it just made her cuter when she argued with me like that.

No matter what she said, I had no intention of seriously fighting with her, so she would always end up losing.

“Number 11, Number 4, be quiet.”

“Okay.”

"I-I’m sorry…”

At Mr. Epinhauser’s words, both Harriet and I quieted down.

In the end, the final exam followed the original novel’s development with Ellen in first and Ludwig in last place. Charlotte seemed to have been beaten by Bertus because of her lacking physical strength.

Their performance at Temple mattered greatly, but it was just too disadvantageous for Charlotte to surpass Bertus.

“Anyway, you’ll have vacation starting next week. Royal Class won’t give you any specific exercises to do during that time, but we hope that you will spend it as meaningfully as possible.”

Mr. Epinhauser wasn’t one for long speeches. I could see that everyone got really excited at the word ‘vacation’.

No matter how great Royal Class’s environment was, it was still best to take a break from everything.

“Number 2 and Number 11, please follow me to the office.”

Mr. Epinhauser ended his closing ceremony by calling Ellen and me to him.

* * *

Mr.Epinhauser hadn’t called us to him because something had happened…

“You said you were planning on going to the Darklands for your vacation.”

“Yes.”

“Yes.”

Mr. Epinhauser had received the notice Ellen and I had sent to him. Usually, there was no need to send any notice on where we would like to spend our vacation.

However, it was unconditionally better if we did.

“I believe it would be better to have a teacher with you, but you refused.”

“…Yes.”

Of course, Temple would be reluctant to send two students from Royal Class to a dangerous place such as the Darklands while they were still first years.

So the original plan was for Mr. Epinhauser to follow us as our homeroom teacher, but both Ellen and I refused.

She was going there to gain practical experience, not for educational purposes.

Of course, I didn’t want Mr. Epinhauser to come with us because Eleris was going to join us after we reached the place.

“Teacher, you should get some rest during the vacations as well.”

This guy, did he want to keep looking after his students even though he could finally take a rest?

Mr. Epinhauser looked at me as I told him that with a smile.

“Just because the students are gone doesn’t mean the teachers can take a break.”

“…Is that so?”

“Yes.”

Anyway, Mr.Epinhauser said that vacations weren’t any different than work for him. What did that guy even do for fun in his life?

It piqued my curiosity again.

"Anyway, we decided to give you our utmost support during the faculty meeting.”

It seemed like they had held a faculty meeting about the matter of us two going to the Darklands; Ellen was originally supposed to receive some teleportation scrolls.

They probably would have left it at that if it was just Ellen who went there. After all, she had proved to be capable enough, but then I had stuck my nose into it.

Mr.Epinhauser took a wad of paper that had been placed on his desk and handed it to Ellen.

“A teleport scroll for each of you, and these are requisition documents with Temple’s seal on them.”

A total of two teleportation scrolls were given to us. They were probably meant to be used in emergency situations to escape.

Additionally, we received requisition documents. They were key items necessary to become an adventurer.

"If you show these documents at Temple’s Armory, they will open it for you. Make sure to not requisition something useless. All requisitioned items are Temple’s property, so be careful not to lose them.”

They weren’t just some slips of paper but documents with which we could requisition weapons and equipment for practical use.

They were weapons created by Temple, which received tremendous support from the Imperial Family. They certainly were on a very different level from the items one usually found in the Al Ligar District, which was full of cutthroats.

That was Royal Class’ majesty. They provided us with such great support; it almost felt strange that he handed those things out to us after just saying a few words.

That wasn’t all. Mr. Epinhauser took out a bag filled with gold coins as well.

“These are 50 gold coins for your travel expenses. I don’t believe you would do something like this, but don’t spend the coins on nonsensical things.”

In addition to the requisition documents, we also received a subsidy equivalent to about 50 million won. He told us not to spend this on nonsensical stuff, but he would never find out if I decided to do just that. Of course, I wouldn’t do that.

“You will work through the Adventurers Guild, so there is no need for you to prepare separate reports. We will check their records later.”

Of course, that meant that they would find out about our actions anyway if they checked the Adventurers Guild's records later.

Since our vacation would start the next week, and our final exams were over, all individual courses had been completed. Except for Mondays and Thursdays, the days when we had common classes, we had no classes at all.

It wasn't actually that much different from having vacations even before they started.

"That's it for the briefing."

Mr. Epinhauser looked at Ellen and me.

"Don't get hurt."

I was really surprised because I didn't expect him to say something like that.

* * *

Our summer vacations started at the end of July and would end at the beginning of September.

During that one month, Ellen and I would go to the Darklands.

However, Ellen said that she wanted to go back a week earlier, even though it would have been fine to stay in the Darklands for the whole month as well.

The reason for that seemed to be the three people she had been hanging out with.

Liana de Grantz said that she would travel between her various villas during her vacation with her end goal being the Edina Islands—where she would stay for a week.

Ellen told me that Liana had invited her three classmates to visit, so it seemed that she would be resting in Duke Grantz's villa for the last week of our vacation.

Of course, if the situation wouldn't allow it, she also wouldn't be able to go there.

"Are you really leaving?"

“You think I’m bullshitting, then?”

Harriet was shocked that Ellen still decided to go to the Darklands and that I chose to go with her. She didn’t seem to understand why we wanted to go to such a dangerous place.

“What if you get hurt?”

Harriet was teary-eyed. It seemed like she couldn’t help but worry about us.

“If we get hurt, then we’ll get hurt. You think we’ll die from that?”

I wouldn’t want to go either if it was just Ellen and me. I wouldn’t have let Ellen go all on her own, either. I was feeling confident because we were protected by our insurance called Eleris. Harriet looked at me and sighed deeply. She wanted to follow us, but she was too scared, and she definitely wouldn’t get permission from Grand Duke Saint-Owan.

Rumors spread throughout class A that Ellen and I planned on going to the Darklands.

“Isn’t that place a bit too dangerous for a date, Reinhardt?”

Bertus seemed to be quite surprised to hear that I was going there as well.

The three idiot brothers seemed to have realized that I wasn’t someone on their level. They talked about what they would do during their vacation while Ellen and I decided to walk down a much harder path that couldn’t be compared to our school life up until then.

“…Don’t get hurt.”

“…Ah, yeah. Got it, thanks.”

Cliffman expressed his worry as shyly as ever.

Why did it always feel like I was talking to some girlfriend when I talked to that guy? It felt really uncomfortable.

We still felt rather awkward around each other, so those kinds of situations kept

happening!

“I don’t understand you two.”

Liana didn’t seem to understand in the least why Ellen and I decided to go to the Darklands.

“If you’re still alive in the last week of the vacation, go along with Ellen and visit me to hang out.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“Okay.”

Liana told me to come to the Edina Islands if I had nothing better to do. That was something I decided to keep in mind.

-E-erm…

As Liana went on her way, I could see Heinrich von Schwarz calling out to her from a distance.

He was set to have a crush on Liana.

-What do you plan on doing… during the vacation?

-Just traveling and playing around.

-Where are you going?

-I’ll be going here and there, but for the last week, I planned a get-together with some people in one place.

-A-ah, is that so?

Liana had a cool personality.

-Do you want to come as well?

-H-huh?! C-can I?!

-Sure. I'll give you the date and location, then.

-Tha-thank you!

That easy-going and cool personality…

The more I looked at it, the more problems it caused.

Heinrich's face was tomato red as if he had never even dreamed of getting invited somewhere by Liana.

There were also some students from Class B that came over.

"…The Darklands. You must have gone crazy. I have no words."

Charlotte could only sigh, as she had found out that I was planning on going to the Darklands too late. If she had known, she definitely would have prevented me from going somehow.

"Do you really know no fear, or what's the reason?"

"I heard there are treasures in the Darklands. I need the money."

Charlotte's mouth was slightly agape as if she found the whole situation absurd.

"Will you not go if I give you that money?"

She meant that she would simply give me money if I needed some, so I shouldn't do anything dangerous.

Urg.

That explanation was hard.

"Then Ellen would have to go alone."

"…You don't actually think that you'd be much help to her, do you?"

Hey!

No matter how well you mean it, wasn't that a bit too harsh? I can get hurt, too!

"Anyway, this isn't just about the money. We won't go to any dangerous places."

"Would adventurers go to the Darklands if they knew which places were dangerous and to what degree? Adventurers flock there because no one knows."

Charlotte raised her voice even while she was in Class-A's dormitory, which she rarely went to. She didn't even stop when Bertus was slipping by.

It was really quite moving that she was so worried about me that she openly showed that side of herself. Charlotte sighed when she saw that I was very unlikely to change my decision.

"…Really, it's ridiculous I even tried."

No matter how much we were friends, it was rather absurd that I didn't listen to her when she, the Princess, told me not to go somewhere, and it was even more absurd that she just gave up instead of ordering me not to go.

"Come to me before you leave. I have something to give to you."

Charlotte stared at me for a moment as if I went completely crazy and then turned around, going back to her dorm.

"Reinhardt. Is it true that you're going to the Darklands?"

Ludwig also appeared before me.

"Yeah."

"Will you be okay? Isn't it dangerous there?"

"I'm going with an almighty weapon by my side, so what could happen?"

When I said that I would have an almighty weapon by my side, he burst into laughter, thinking that I meant Ellen.

Of course, he would think I meant Ellen, but I was actually referring to Eleris.

“I’m going to Delphin’s hometown for the vacation.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah, I decided to take their ranger training. It’s going to be fun. Reinhardt, do you want to receive their training with me sometime?”

“If I have the time.”

Like in the novel, it seemed like Ludwig would go to Talprad, Delphin’s hometown, to train as a ranger.

It sure was strange, seeing so many people saying they were worried about me.

I kind of felt like I became quite popular.

Anyway, rumors about me going to the Darklands spread throughout the whole first year, so things were pretty noisy even before the vacations even started.

* * *

Monday through Tuesday.

“Junior, I heard you’re going to the Darklands.”

Adriana talked to me during our early morning training. She seemed to be worried.

“Yeah, but I’m not going anywhere dangerous, so don’t worry.”

“Hmmm… I’m sure you’ll figure things out on your own, but… I wish I could go with you.”

Adriana seemed to think that it was a little much to only send Ellen and me to such a dangerous place.

Come to think of it, Adriana could cast recovery spells, so it would have been nice if she went along with us, she was also skilled enough. Adriana sighed.

“I decided to go back to the monastery to receive training during the vacation…”

However, it seemed that Adriana had planned out her vacation already. She hadn't given up on the path to priesthood, although she did struggle with her own faith because of Olivia and what the Knights Templar had done.

I smiled when I saw that she felt sorry for not being able to accompany us.

"It's okay."

"If you ever plan on going there again, let me know in advance. I'll make sure to find some time."

After that, Adriana had been nagging me throughout our whole workout session, telling me not to get hurt and never to wander off to dangerous places.

CHAPTER 148

Although our vacation would only start after our common classes on Thursday, Ellen and I went to the armory on Tuesday.

Temple had enough practical weapons in stock to equip all students who had combat majors in case of emergency. Actually, that rule only existed in theory, as they wouldn't send Temple students into battle. However, after the Gate incident, all Temple students would be called to action.

So, the fully-stocked armory in Temple was kind of an additional setting to give enough justification for how all students of Temple managed to go to battle during that Gate situation.

In fact, I actually set up Temple's armory when I wrote about the Gate incident. Before that, there never was any mention of something like an Armory, and I never even thought about Temple having something like that.

After all, I had set it up after the end of the school life part.

Why would a school need an armory with enough weapons in stock to arm all its students?

When I thought of myself back then, I sure was an absurd person.

Although the Armory was one of Temple's main facilities, it was a place students didn't usually have to go to, so when we stepped out of the tram it was the first time for both of us seeing the facility, even after we had spent a good amount of time in Temple.

"I thought it would be like a warehouse."

Ellen seemed a little dazed.

Temple's Armory looked more like a huge museum than a warehouse, though. Although it was pretty much deserted, we could still see quite a few guards guarding it, as it still held a great number of Temple's weapons.

We showed our requisition documents to the manager at the guard post outside of the Armory.

“It’s B-Class.”

After he looked at our documents, he exclaimed and then nodded slowly.

‘B-Class? What does that mean?’

Was there some kind of setting I wasn’t aware of again?

The manager started to provide answers to my mental questions.

“That means that you can even borrow B-Class equipment. Access to S and A-Class equipment is restricted, but you can borrow anything below Class B.”

“Ah, okay."

It seemed that Temple organized its equipment by grades. Still, we were part of Royal Class, so even if we couldn’t access S-Class, we couldn’t even get A-Class equipment?

I thought that was a bit of a shame, but the manager just crossed his arms.

“Even just seeing B-Class equipment on the market is extremely rare. A-Class equipment is already treated as a county’s treasure. Not to mention S-Class equipment… These types of equipment can’t get transferred carelessly.”

I didn’t know anything about the rating system, but it seemed to be true that Temple’s Armory was full of weapons on the level of artifacts.

No matter if you’re a Royal Class student or not, they couldn’t give out that kind of equipment so easily. There wasn’t even any type of crisis at the moment.

S-Class equipment was probably items that were slightly inferior to Alsbringer, which was the hero Artorius’ weapon, or Ellen’s Lament.

I wasn’t sure if Alsbringer was kept in Temple at that point. It was probably kept in the Imperial Palace. History had changed a lot, so I didn’t know if Ludwig would be able to get it as he did in the original.

Ellen and I had a guide next to us.

“Is there anything you want specifically?”

“I think we would need some kind of weapon and armor,” I answered the guide’s question.

“Yes, understood. Then, I would ask you to come this way.”

The inside of the Armory was so incredibly vast that one would probably get lost without a guide. As we had B-Class requisition documents with us, the guide took us to a place where B-Class equipment was displayed.

Ellen stared blankly at the endless sea of weapons, armor, boots, and various other items in front of us.

The guide started explaining while we were walking.

“Most of the B-Class equipment found in Temple could be called antiques. They are expensive items, so you have to return them after use.”

Their quality was one matter, but that was just the intro. The word “antique” immediately made an item even more expensive.

In Al Ligar’s shopping district, there were only a few of those types of items, but they were lined up endlessly in the armory.

Even if one went to buy something like that in Al Ligar it would pose a troublesome challenge.

However, we could requisition them in Temple just because we were Royal Class students. There was no need to bargain at all.

That was the majesty of Temple.

“Let’s look at the weapons first, shall we?”

The guide stood in front of a display box filled with weapons.

My eyes were practically flashing.

The box was divided into sections for swords, spears, axes, bows, and blunt weapons.

However, the swords were also divided again: shortswords, longswords, bastard swords, two-handed swords, as well as that “Hellblade” thing.

There were a ton of different weapons on display.

Ah.

I had a really hard time choosing.

There were so many that I had no idea what to pick.

“May I hold the swords?”

“Go ahead.”

The guide opened the display box containing the swords.

It seemed like Ellen didn’t plan on using Lament.

Ellen tried to check the weight and balance of the swords as she held them.

“Oh, it seems that this sword has hardening magic on it. And if one activated it, one could temporarily use it as a blunt weapon…”

“Oh, this one’s good as well. It has fire magic enchantment on it, so it could be used in place of a torch. It’s useful in many ways, especially when one needs to make a bonfire, but the mana stone intake…”

“This would be a good choice, but do you have the strength to handle a two-hander…? Wow, you’re stronger than I thought, aren’t you?”

Ellen examined the dozens of swords while the guide informed Ellen about what kind of enchantments were placed on the weapons.

What the fuck, how did that guy memorize what enchantment all those swords had?

And why did it take her so long? I thought she would choose one after looking at a few.

Ellen, who was very serious about weapons, was completely engrossed in shopping around, while I was blown away by the guide explaining the swords' details without getting tired.

After looking around for a long time, Ellen chose a simple-styled longsword with an automatic restoration function.

"There are many other weapons that look really good."

"There are, but you should also use something like this."

"Aren't those with lightning enchantment or something better?"

She could choose any magic weapon there, so wasn't one with only automatic restoration far too simple? As I looked around, I saw many with very strange features. Ellen shook her head at my words.

"It's much more comfortable if the weapon can maintain itself."

"…Ah. Right."

Comfortable… No, it was extremely convenient.

It probably was something she had heard her brother say.

If her brother recommended something like that, it felt like it would be a cheat key.

I couldn't say anything against it!

It was later explained that swords would wear out rather quickly if one didn't maintain them properly and oil them, different from swords in games, regardless of whether they were magic weapons or not. The burden on a sword would continue to pile up, so it seemed that the swords would lose their function quite quickly if a battle went on for a long time.

A weapon with automatic restoration would keep the sword in good condition on its own, so there was no need to maintain it after every battle.

In the end, Ellen had chosen a weapon best suited for actual battle.

She then contemplated whether she should take a bow with her or not, but she soon turned away. We were on our way to be adventurers, not fight in a war, so she decided not to take unnecessary equipment.

After that, Ellen and I chose some leather armor. There were chain mails and plate armor with lightweight enchantment as well, but they restricted one's movement, so they were inconvenient.

The complete set of armor didn't even cover the entire body. Ellen and I were only wearing something like a breastplate and something that looked like shin guard.

"Is that really enough?"

Our neck, arms, and thighs were completely exposed, so I didn't get the sense that it would protect us well.

"…It's summer."

Right, she was more or less saying that if we wore more than that, it could be seen as asking for death. It was actually pretty frustrating, though. Of course, I couldn't feel the weight of the armor at all because all parts were enchanted with lightweight magic.

The guide also added that the armor could sufficiently protect us because it was fire-resistant, acid-resistant, and had hardening magic enchanted on it in addition to the lightweight magic.

After choosing two backpacks with weight reduction magic cast on them and some boots suitable for long-distance travel, I felt ready to start our journey.

As we were picking our armor and weapons, I finally realized that I was walking into a very dangerous area with my own two feet, no matter how many safety measures I took.

After we chose our gear, Ellen and I packed all of it into our backpacks.

"Do you think we should take some horses with us?"

"…I don't know how to ride a horse."

I knew how because I had taken some horseback riding classes, even if I couldn't say that I was that good at it yet. Ellen didn't know how to do it at all. However, if she decided to learn it, she would do so really quickly.

"And we won't be able to afford to take care of those horses."

I couldn't help but agree with Ellen's words. It would be really hard and troublesome to take care of those horses in the place we planned on going to.

We would depart on Friday, right after the Thursday we had our last classes on.

After we chose our basic equipment, we were basically done there.

"Let's pack everything up and leave."

"Yes."

It was time to plan our schedule.

* * *

'We are going to the Darklands.'

That statement was pretty vague. Put in different terms, it was the same as saying we would go to the Northern Hemisphere of the Earth. The Darklands referred to the eastern half of that huge continent.

We had to meticulously plan out which region of the Darklands we would travel to and which paths we would take when we were there.

Ellen planned on recklessly going to the Darklands after registering as an adventurer, wandering here and there. However, the story changed after I decided to join her.

As Charlotte said, it would be suicide to just wander around thoughtlessly without knowing what dangers hid inside the Darklands.

"There are a total of three major outposts built in the Darklands."

Loyar spoke while examining a huge map unfolded before her.

Ellen and I had left Temple and gone to the newly created headquarters of the Rotary Gang.

Not too long prior to that, I had given some instructions to Loyar.

‘I’m going to the Darklands with Ellen.’

‘…Yes?’

‘Get some information from the Thieves’ Guild… Some information on the Darklands that humans would have.'

‘…Yes?'

‘And I bet you have some things memorized as well, right? Like places that we could safely go to.'

‘Yeeees?’

‘Why the questioning tone? If your boss tells you to do something, you have to do it, you know?’

‘…Yes.'

If we had a map of the Darklands made by someone from the Demon Realm, we could avoid doing all the troublesome things, but getting something like that would usually be impossible. Instead, I ordered her to retrieve a map of the areas of the Darklands that had already been explored from the Thieves’ Guild.

“This area is where most adventurers are active—the Exian Outpost.”

That outpost was built by humans during the Demon World War.

The outpost was furnished with a super-large Warpgate. That was also the area from which the Allied Forces reached the Demon Realm during the Demon World War and the point from which they returned to the Empire.

Before that, bases and warp gates were shirked for supply issues and various other reasons, and because most humans had withdrawn, most of those bases got destroyed. It seemed to be pretty hard to install and maintain bases deep in the

Darklands.

Therefore, except for the abandoned bases, the only outpost left on the front lines was the Exian Outpost.

Because the Demon World War had ended, the outpost had transformed into a base for adventurers who craved the treasures the Darklands held.

“Adventurers have secured safe zones around that area, and they are constantly expanding their bases. The eastern part, which the Allied Forces had gone through, has been developed quite a bit; however, very little has been covered in the northern and southern parts.”

The eastern parts, where the Allied Forces had advanced to, had been developed in a flash, so it was relatively safe and secure.

However, some danger might lurk to the south and north of the outpost.

“They’ve recently started to explore the northern part, but there have been some bad rumors making their rounds. There are some who made a fortune by going there; however, there are quite a few who never returned.”

There were many cases where groups of adventurers never returned from there. That probably meant that something was in that area.

“In the south, there’s a wide forest area. It isn’t a jungle or anything, and there don’t seem to be many dangerous things in there, but they lack the means to properly secure the area.”

Loyar continued to explain to that point, then alternated between looking at Ellen and me.

“The safest areas would be to the East of the Exian Outpost and the Maginot Line around St. Point. I think it would be best if you explored those areas. I heard that they pay you well enough just by filling out some unknown areas on the map.”

The Adventurers’ Guild paid out money just by providing them information on the Darklands’ topography. Even if one wasn’t all that eager on hunting monsters, there were many ways to get some money. It was a place where greedy people would either hit the jackpot or die trying.

Loyar seemed pretty much against Ellen and me going to the Darklands. Of course, she seemed quite relieved when she heard that Eleris would be joining us midway.

It had yet to be confirmed what lay in the north and south of the Exian outpost.

That was why Loyar told us that it would be best if we stayed in the safe eastern part.

“Thank you.”

Ellen thanked Loyar for her advice.

“Aunty.”

Of course, Ellen tended to provoke Loyar by saying things one shouldn’t, under no circumstances, say to her.

“…Follow me."

At Ellen calling her Aunty, I could see some veins bulging on Loyar’s forehead.

“Let me beat you up until you’re all nice and tender today.”

Of course, if she didn’t do that, Loyar wouldn’t fight her, so there was a reason for that, at least.

CHAPTER 149

-Bang!

“Kuhuk!”

‘What an incredible growth rate.'

Loyar’s eyes widened as she watched Ellen roll on the floor.

It had only been about a month since that girl had asked for fighting lessons.

However, in that single month, she had grown at a ridiculous rate. Her reaction speed and dexterity were already incomparable to what they were a month ago.

If she learned how to strengthen her body with magic power, in that state… ’

Even in Ellen’s current state, without knowing how to strengthen her body, Loyar had a hard time against her.

The difference between knowing and not knowing how to strengthen was like the difference between heaven and earth. People who could do it weren’t called monsters for nothing.

Ellen was able to fight head to head with her without knowing anything about that.

No matter how similar a Lycanthrope looked to a human, they couldn’t be compared to humans in terms of strength in the least. Even still, Ellen managed to catch up with her little by little, even with Loyar’s magical body strengthening.

Loyar had never seen or heard of a human being like that.

Ellen staggered and brushed the dirt off her body. Both her eyes, filled with pain, still looked at Loyar unwaveringly.

Although Ellen seemed really depressed after she collapsed last time, she just continued to rush towards Loyar even if she fell over and over again.

She was just like the ground that hardened after rain.

“My turn.”

“Come.”

After Ellen had fallen once again, her mental fortitude got even stronger.

-Kakang!

Loyar slashed her sword at Ellen’s shoulder while attempting to thrust her fist into Ellen’s abdomen.

-Spin!

However, as if she foresaw that attack, Ellen turned her body to dodge while not forgetting to attack Loyar’s temple with her left elbow.

-Swish!

But at that time, Loyar lowered her stance to evade it, putting her arm between Ellen’s legs and slamming it sideways into them.

-Bang!

“Kuhuk!”

“Huff… Huff… what a monstrous girl…”

Loyar looked down at Ellen, who was coughing, exhausted.

There were a lot of people in the world who were stronger than that girl.

However…

In ten years, no…

Would there be anyone stronger than her in five years time?

For the first time in her life, Loyar felt fear when looking at a human.

Why on earth was her master telling her to help Ellen train and saying that she needed more practical experience, even attaching Eleris to her side to help her out?

Loyar probably wouldn't even feel that way if she was faced with the Emperor.

She didn't think she would even feel that way if she saw a dragon's egg laying before her, about to hatch.

Ellen seemed to be like some mysterious being Loyar wasn't able to understand. That tremendous pressure and fear she felt wasn't just because of her strength but also at the speed in which she grew stronger.

It confused Loyar.

This isn't right.

I don't think I should do this.

Why was the Lord circling around this girl so much?

"You, let me ask you a question."

Ellen staggered to her feet as she heard Loyar's words.

"Yes."

"Can you die for Reinhardt?"

At Loyar's sudden question, Ellen seemed to feel a little taken aback.

She pondered about it for a long time before speaking:

"……I don't know."

In the end, Ellen couldn't help but answer as such.

"No, I don't know…"

Loyar just silently looked at her and smiled.

"Yeah, that's enough."

She answered that she didn't know.

However, she seriously pondered whether she would be able to die for Reinhardt or not.

Loyar thought that this was already sufficient enough for an answer.

"I have something to tell you."

"…Okay?"

At Loyar's sudden words, Ellen only tilted her head a bit and nodded.

* * *

After our last class on Thursday ended…

"Uwooh! It's over!"

Everyone exited the school, led by Kono Lint, who was the most excited about school being over.

It seemed like Mr. Epinhauser's words when he advised us to spend our vacation in a meaningful way, even if we didn't have any assignments, completely left Kono Lint's mind.

There were quite a few among the people there that were born with the silver spoon of talent in their mouths, so they didn't know how to work hard. A typical example was those three idiot brothers.

I mean, the setting was that they were the way they were because they were only selected based on talent. There would be quite a few cases where they clashed with the Orbis Class, who consisted of incredibly hard-working people.

Still, I wondered how those "best talents" could be so incompetent.

We were leaving the next morning, so I decided to finish up my training schedule beforehand. After returning to the dormitory, I first visited Charlotte.

She had told me to come see her before I left.

“Here.”

What Charlotte handed to me was a medal.

“…Isn’t this the Imperial Crest?”

“Yes.”

I held the Imperial Family’s Crest in my hands.

“With this, you should get most public institutions to cooperate with you, and it should serve as a sufficient enough threat.”

The medal proved that I was someone under the protection of the Imperial Family. I didn’t know if that thing had any magical abilities, but it was clear that there were some problems I could solve just by having it.

“I can’t just give this to anyone, okay?"

“Is that so?"

Charlotte made some big gestures as she said that.

“I mean, you always anger people by doing useless things. Sigh.”

Charlotte nagged me for a while longer, seeming slightly annoyed. No matter how strong Ellen was, if I continued to lose my temper as I had during that kidnapping case, things might turn ugly. There was a good chance things wouldn’t end so well next time.

“You’re leaving tomorrow, right?”

“Yeah, in the morning.”

Charlotte stared at me with her arms crossed.

“If I may give you one piece of advice…”

Charlotte smiled subtly.

“Be careful of other people.”

“I will.”

I fully understood what she meant by that.

She had given me the Imperial Family’s Crest to ward off other people, not monsters.

* * *

Our vacation started on Thursday; the ones who were especially impatient hurried to leave Temple.

What was surprising was that Harriet, who I thought would return home as soon as she was able to, saw Ellen and me off on Friday morning.

It wasn’t just Harriet; there was another unexpected person beside her.

Adelia had also come to see Ellen off.

It seemed like both of them had stayed awake all night.

We had already finished our preparations, standing before them with our armor on and the backpacks on our backs.

“H-hey, Ellen…”

“Hey.”

“Could you… accept this?"

Adelia fidgeted a bit and handed something to Ellen: It was a bracelet made of blue metal.

“Re-Reinhardt… You too…”

And showing that she didn’t only have something for Ellen, she held out a bracelet with a similar shape towards me.

"…What is this?"

Adelia began to mumble when she heard my question.

"It's… a disposable… protective charm. So when you're in danger… This might help you. We made it in a hurry, so it can only be used once… sorry."

Ah.

It seemed that they stayed up several nights to make those bracelets.

I was sure they didn't just make them in a day. Adelia's talent lay in magic crafting, meaning making magic items, but Harriet was also able to do the same thing.

They worked together to make the two magic bracelets. Harriet turned away from my gaze, not wanting to talk about it.

I could see the dark circles under her eyes, though.

"Thanks."

Ellen thanked them briefly.

But did Adelia seriously apologize for not being able to give us a better gift?

How low was her self-esteem?

"Thank you, you two."

At my words, Adelia scratched the back of her head, and Harriet's face slightly reddened. Then she muttered, acting as she didn't hear me.

"Don't forget to come to the Edina Islands."

"Yeah."

She meant to say that we should come back safely and take care not to get hurt.

* * *

We would head towards St. Point via the Exian Outpost, and—on the way—Eleris would join us.

Of course, I would pretend as if I didn't know her and just make her join us as a useful adventuring wizard. She would just act like a novice wizard who wasn't that adept in using her magic, and if we were met with danger, she would reveal her true skills.

That was the plan.

Ellen and I registered as adventurers at the Adventurers Guild located in the Exian Outpost.

Then, in an inn somewhere in St. Point, we would naturally come in contact with Eleris.

Then we would form a party and just explore the area around St. Point.

With Eleris by our side, we could even go to slightly more dangerous places.

Although the equipment we received from Temple was of great importance, there was also the Imperial Family's Crest, an object which we could use to politically resolve a certain type of trouble we might run into, and the protection bracelets in case of an emergency.

Insurance layered over insurance layered over even more insurance.

Ellen and I moved to the gigantic Warp Gate located in the Imperial Capital.

Unfortunately, even if we were students of Royal Class, they wouldn't let us use the Warp Gate for free.

"…This is hella expensive."

"…Yeah."

After calculating our expenses, Ellen also nodded to my statement.

After seeing the fee we had to pay to use the Warp Gate, we understood why Temple gave us so much money.

The Exian Outpost was located at the easternmost tip of the humans' territory, so we had to travel a very long distance.

It would take four trips through super-large Warp Gates to reach the Exian Outpost.

It would take two gold coins per warp. Since Ellen and I were two, we would need four gold coins just for one warp.

A one-way trip would cost us sixteen gold coins, and to make a round trip, we would need 32 coins.

Then the money we could actually spend on our trip was sixteen gold coins.

Still, that was more than enough as travel expenses, but that seemed to be the reason why Temple gave us 50 gold coins, a huge amount, for one month's travel expenses.

It seemed very expensive compared to a flight with an airplane, but considering that it wasn't required for us to physically travel that distance, it was actually quite reasonable.

No, in fact, it couldn't be compared to a simple flight at all, as this was far more efficient.

We applied to use the Warp Gate and then waited for our turn. Since that terrorist incident, it seemed that the security around the Warp Gates had become much tighter. Their identity verification process was also very thorough, and they even did a body search of anyone who wanted to use the Gate.

There weren't just guards, but personnel that looked like Knights were also deployed to guard the Warp Gate.

"Next."

Ellen and I handed our IDs to the guard.

Our Temple Royal Class student IDs.

"…Pass through."

The two of us moved towards our first stop.

* * *

We had to use Warp Gates a total of four times, stopping by each transit point.

However, there was a problem with that.

"…I didn't expect us to run into this kind of problem."

"…Me neither."

Ellen and I stared blankly at the long queue stretching from the super-large Warp Gate.

We couldn't even get into the line.

"Well… I should have expected as much, though."

We were in a place called Salam, a trading city located in a part of the Empire. I didn't really know much about Salam. I didn't need to, after all. It was just a transit point.

However, if it was a trading city, it surely was a passageway for numerous merchants, suppliers, and supplies.

So even though the super large Warp Gate was right in front of us, it was so far away.

"I think we were too used to how things worked in the Capital."

"Yeah, probably."

There were more than ten super-large Warp Gates located in the Capital, So crowds were equally divided between them, greatly shortening the queues—excluding that time when the Victory Festival was taking place.

However, the places outside of the Capital had at most two to three super-large Warp Gates; usually, they would just have one, though.

In general, a place with just one such Gate would become a huge city simply because of that.

Those super-large Gates that could move you over a long distance were mostly

connected to the surrounding small and medium-sized Gates as well.

Therefore, it was inevitable that bottlenecks occurred around the super-large Gates—they were both an exit as well as an entrance, so people just kept on pouring in and out at all times.

That was the difference between the Capital and some provincial town.

There were many people waiting to use it, including what looked to be merchants, wagons, and travelers.

Although the queue was right in front of us, we wouldn't be able to even get into the line.

We simply couldn't.

"Even if we managed to get a waiting ticket, we probably won't be able to reach the Gate before tomorrow."

That was what Ellen said after she went to ask someone about the situation.

It was only natural that they limited the number of users for the day.

" I don't think things will be different at the next Gate either, right?"

"…Yes."

It was good that the Gates could transport people faster than a plane, but if we had to wait for two days to use it, what was even the point?

If something like that happened at the next Gate as well, it would take us another two days and another two days at the Gate following it, so it would take us six days to get to our goal. It seemed like Ellen hadn't even thought of that as she just blankly stared at the start of the queue.

The cost of going back and forth was also immense, but if we just wasted our time waiting, spending that money was completely useless.

"Alright."

I made up my mind.

“…Have you thought of something?"

When Ellen asked me that, I put my hand on her shoulder.

“Let’s use our power.”

I took out the Imperial Family’s Crest, to which Ellen’s eyes widened.

I’m sorry, Charlotte.

I’m going to sell your name!

CHAPTER 150

“We want to use the Gate.”

“Please pull a waiting ticket and—”

“Look at this.”

“!”

There was no place in the human territory where touting the Imperial Family’s name wouldn’t work, as the whole human territory was part of the Empire.

As soon as they confirmed the authenticity of the crest, they let us use the Gate right away with no questions asked.

It seemed that they wanted to exempt us from paying the fee as well, but I insisted on paying as it would probably cause some problems in the future. Getting the highest priority in the use of Gates already seemed like an unfair advantage, but if we were also exempted from paying, that would reach someone’s ears.

“…I think what you’re doing is bad.”

I shook my head at Ellen’s words.

“I was told to use this in emergency situations, so what’s the problem with using it now?”

If you asked me, the situation clearly was an emergency.

Our travel plans had been about to go down the drain, and she didn’t think it wasn’t an emergency?

No, didn’t Charlotte actually give me the Crest because she knew such an event was going to happen? Wasn’t she thinking a bit too far ahead? Did Charlotte know everything?

“…Winning mentality?"

“…Why are you saying that right now? And this doesn’t have anything to do with a winning mentality or anything.”

‘His ability… is already at that level, huh?’

I bet that’s what she was thinking!

And my ability’s name wasn’t winning mentality, but self-suggestion!

“We can just wait two days, then.”

“…No.”

She was a nice kid, after all, but she was impatient as well.

Ellen and I were able to reach the Exian Outpost in just a day, ignoring any queues lined up before the next Gates we had to go through using the fast pass called the Imperial Family’s Crest.

* * *

The Exian Outpost was the first human base built in the Darklands.

Their Demon World War campaign started from that place, and they also returned to the Empire through the same Gate.

It was their starting point as well their exit.

That was the Exian Outpost.

[Quest appeared – Adventures in the Darklands]

[Description: Complete your adventure in the Darklands safely.]

[Rewards : Rewards may vary depending on your performance. Rack in some results; don’t just cling onto others.]

And I was even given a quest.

However, it didn't tell me what reward I would get; it just told me to rack in some results. Cling? What did those guys think I went there for?

It was clear it was worded like that because it thought I would just cling to someone and easily get some rewards after I returned.

What was it going to give me?! It might just give me a single achievement point after judging my performance. I was really worried that would actually happen!

Anyway, I decided that I shouldn't worry about it for the moment—I'd lose as soon as I cared about what it did.

"It's not much different here."

"Did you think the sky would be all dark and ominous just because we are in the Darklands?"

The sky was dark around the place the Demon King's Castle used to be, but where we were wasn't much different from the Empire. Although the place could be called rather barren, even during the rule of the Demon King, I was rather certain that the sky was just overcast that day.

"Shouldn't this be called a city rather than a base?"

"You're right."

The word 'city' felt more appropriate than base because the army had almost completely withdrawn already, leaving only a bare minimum. The site, once a large military base, was the new hotspot for adventurers.

The surrounding buildings didn't seem much different from the ones found in the cities we had passed through.

The people seemed different, though.

While the guards and soldiers wore uniform equipment, the people there were armed with many different types of equipment.

Since most of the people there were adventurers, they differed from the soldiers in that they were armed in light armor rather than heavy armor.

That was a completely different kind of city, with only a small number of civilians and a large number of wanderers coming and going.

The city could be called a City of Adventurers.

“Let’s go to the Adventurers’ Guild.”

“Yes.”

The Demon World War ended at the start of that year, and only half a year had passed since its end. Therefore, the exploration of the Darklands had only just begun, and the pioneering process hadn’t progressed much, so it was impossible to proceed further.

Adventurers were just pouring in, aiming to get rich quickly, as the exploration of the Darklands was still in its infancy.

That was why both veteran adventurers and newcomers who were just about to become adventurers flocked to the Exian Outpost.

As there were a lot of wandering adventurers pouring in, it was only natural that the inn businesses, providing their accommodations, flourished. Merchants selling equipment and supplies flocked towards that place as well as entertainment businesses for wealthy adventurers.

…The shadowy forces who planned on devouring that quick money also grew by the day. There would be gambling houses as well as many thieves.

Seeing the number of people coming and going and the countless new buildings being built every day made it clear that the rapid expansion of the city was tremendous.

As such, it was only natural for those who wanted to become adventurers to visit that place’s branch of the Adventurers’ Guild.

One didn’t need any qualifications or have to fulfill any kind of requirements to become an adventurer.

Anyone could become one.

However, they had a grading system in which one would start at the lowest rank, F-rank, and improve it through their performance. Naturally, F-rank adventures couldn't receive any support from the Guild.

At that level, adventurer's licenses granted one neither rights nor proved one's qualification, so it was fine to just give it out. The Adventurers Guild didn't seem to actively manage the adventurers, and they probably shouldn't.

By the way, when I first visited the Capital, I had wondered what the adventurers were actually doing for a living, and there I was about to become one myself.

Well, I really didn't know what to expect in this world.

The procedure for getting a license was rather simple. Without having to wait very long, we managed to get our adventurer's licenses in the form of something like an ID card.

Both Ellen and I were then F-ranks.

"…"

Ellen stood blankly in front of the crowded Adventurers Guild counter. Although our business was over there, she didn't take a step from where she stood.

I had an idea for why she was doing that.

At the end of Ellen's gaze, there were some hanging pictures—huge paintings hanging high above the counter.

Names were written below them:

[Adventurers' Guild – Hall of Fame]

[Ragdna Olfi]

[Shaden]

[Ragan Artorius]

[Müller]

[Sezaria]

There were pictures of five people. The middle picture showed Ragan Artorius.

It was the party consisting of the five heroes that had defeated the Demon Lord.

They were adventurers as well.

They had even reached the SS rank.

After the Demon World War, the Adventurers Guild raised their rank to such a legendary level. That high a rank didn't even exist at first.

As the greatest adventurers in history, all of them kind of became something like role models.

Ellen was staring at her brother, who had become a legend, stuffed between the other pictures.

What was she thinking, I wondered.

She didn't look like she was proud of him, at least.

* * *

There was no need for us to raise our adventurer rank. We would only work as adventurers for a month while on vacation.

Our registration with the Adventurers Guild was merely a formal matter; however, it sure would be nice if we could make some money.

So rather than taking up any requests, we would explore the area and report things to the guild to get paid once we found anything special.

Of course, if there were any good requests, we would try for those as well.

I didn't know how Ellen felt about having reached the same starting line as her brother.

"We'll have to take a carriage to reach St. Point."

“Yes.”

There were no trams or mana trains there, as it wasn’t the Capital. We would have to rely on primitive means of transportation like carriages from then on.

We made our way to St. Point, where I would pretend to meet Eleris by chance and then make her join the party. After that, we could take up a request from the Adventurers Guild Branch located there or wander around as we pleased.

Ellen and I headed to a nearby carriage station.

There were countless carriages lined up everywhere around the station.

“We want to go to St. Point.”

“Ah, then hop on. Price is two silver coins per person.”

Ellen paid four silver coins before we both boarded the carriage.

“Just one more person, and we’ll be off!”

There was no set departure time, so it seemed like they’d leave as soon as the carriage was full. There were five people in the carriage except Ellen and me.

All of them seemed to stare at Ellen.

“Ooh, little girlie, you already an adventurer at your age?”

“…?”

Ellen tilted her head at the sudden question.

“Are ya even strong enough to hold a sword?”

“Also, you look like an aristocrat. You’ll get hurt, you know?”

“Hey, maybe that other kid is strong or something! Is he her escort?”

-Hahahaha!

I didn't know whether the people in the carriage all knew each other or not, but it seemed rather strange to them to find young children in a place where usually only adventurers gathered.

It looked like they thought she was a noble girl trying to play adventurer and that I was her escort.

If you were to ask me, it should be the other way around. But those bastards? Weren't they even more cheeky than me?

If something happened, would she actually protect me?

"Be careful, kids. This isn't a good place."

– *Tap, tap*

The man who seemed to be in his thirties next to me patted my shoulder with his pot-like hands. I didn't know if that guy was a veteran or something, but I felt somewhat gloomy.

Certainly, just by looking at our appearance, one would think we were youngsters; well, we actually were youngsters.

Because of Charlotte's words that I might make more trouble for Ellen if I gave in to my temper, I had planned on putting up with their rude behavior to some extent.

I didn't even want to start a useless fight.

We weren't in Temple anymore. Ellen and I were holding swords, and so were they.

It would be a fight with blades, not fists.

"Phew."

Soon, the last passenger boarded the carriage.

"How are you all doing?"

It was a young man with dark blue hair. He somehow gave off a gloomy impression.

The adventurers didn't seem to be well acquainted with each other, but they did greet each other briefly.

-Alright, we're departing!

The coachman spurred the horse on, and soon the coach started moving while greatly rattling.

As I was used to mana trains, the rattling of the carriage was completely unfamiliar to me.

Ellen was sitting across from me, and the last passenger, the young man, sat beside me.

"Oh, how unexpected to see friends that are even younger than me. Nice to meet you."

"Ah, yeah."

He smiled somewhat sadly and held his hand out to me, I couldn't refuse, so I shook it.

"I'm Dara Austin. And you are?"

"I'm Reinhardt."

"How old are you?"

"I'm seventeen."

The man next to me kept chatting away. He sure was annoying.

However, I couldn't just tell him to shut up because he didn't seem to hold any ill will towards me, smiling at me like that.

I didn't know how long it would take to get to St. Point, so I didn't want to cause any conflict with that person next to me.

Austin said he turned twenty that year. He mumbled that he thought that he started at a fairly young age but was surprised that there were people even younger than

him, like Ellen and me, around.

“Are you two in a party?”

“Yes.”

When I told him Ellen and I were a team, Austin nodded slowly.

“Then would you like to join our group? The others are waiting for me at St Point. It would be safer if we moved together… There is also a B-ranked adventurer in the party. He’s a veteran, so if you follow him, you should be safe. I’m still an F-rank.”

Austin said that it would help me build my career.

“We’re fine.”

However, Ellen flatly refused, as if she didn’t want to hear anything more about it. The sharp refusal made Austin feel a little ashamed, so he scratched the back of his head.

“That’s that then.”

“Ah, well. Yeah…”

“Hey buddy, ain’t it too obvious that you’re flirting around here?”

“Tha-that’s not what I’m…”

The men around us jeered at him, leading to Austin’s face turning bright red. Apparently he was interested in Ellen.

Not only Austin, but that old man that patted my shoulder also talked a lot, although some of his stories were actually useful.

“Is the northern part of Exian still so difficult to get to?”

“Well yeah. No one’s coming back from there, after all.”

“Not sure why. Some say there’s an orc colony around there; others say it’s a swarm of goblins.”

“Didn’t a subjugation squad of more than 50 go there last time?”

“They’re all missing.”

“Well… Whatever it is, it has to be something really strong.”

The most dangerous place around there was that area, the northern part of the Exian Outpost they were talking about.

St. Point was relatively safe, as it was one of the bases the Allied Forces built in the east. Most of the adventurers heading to the northern part never returned.

“How about the south?”

“They say it’s completely covered by a forest. There’s nothing else.”

“I’ve been there for more than two weeks, and I didn’t find anything but trees. It’s not any different than a desert there.”

“There are rumors that it isn’t a forest actually, but something like a barrier. A maze, maybe.”

“Why would there be a barrier in such a place?”

“I don’t know.”

“That’s not it. It seems that this place was once a dragon’s tomb, but the land got cursed…”

I would have liked to have known the truth about that place, but there were so many useless rumors floating about.

I felt like a quest might actually pop up, but nothing like that happened.

If there were too many rumors, one would never find out the real truth.

The carriages leaving the Outpost followed the route the Allied Forces had taken. The surrounding landscape wasn’t particularly different or anything.

“Isn’t it strange that they call it the Darklands, even though it isn’t particularly dark

here?”

Austin muttered absentmindedly as he looked out, watching the scenery outside of the carriage.

It’s not an exaggeration to say that the place didn’t look much different from the Human Realm. Rather, the vast landscape spread out before us looked much more beautiful.

And yet people called that place the Darklands.

“Yeah.”

It wasn’t me who answered him, but Ellen.

Austin seemed a little surprised that Ellen actually answered him.

-*Rattle, rattle, rattle.*

The carriage was moving slowly. Feeling it swaying back and forth like that made me remember some old memories.

It…

It felt like riding in a Deuce and a Half back in the military.

It was kind of uncomfortable, but I somehow felt like I could sleep very well in there.

"Reinhardt.”

Right when I was about to fall asleep, Ellen called out to me in the softest voice.

“…?”

As soon as I looked at Ellen, I couldn’t really explain what it was, but I could feel something.

She seemed calmer than usual.

A determined look.

I was able to tell what she was thinking to some extent by just looking her in the eyes at that point.

-Rattle… Rattle…

The carriage was getting slower.

There was no reason for it to slow down, but it did.

Stay alert.

That was what Ellen was trying to tell me with her eyes.

The surrounding landscape had already changed—there were some trees growing around a wide road.

It seemed like we were heading towards a sparsely populated place.

I could see the adventurers inside the carriage pretending to be calm, not even holding their weapons in hand.

They were looking at us while pretending not to.

As if they were waiting for the right moment.

Watch out for people.

That moment had finally arrived.

Were they actually watching us as they were pretending to talk about banal things?

I had goosebumps all over my body.

-Bam!

“Kurg!”

The next moment, I could see Ellen mercilessly slamming the hilt of her sword into the person sitting next to her.

“!”

"Wha-what!"

Before they could even try anything, Ellen began her attack. They didn’t know this was going to happen, so it seemed like the adventurers were greatly surprised.

Austin, in particular, was startled by the unexpected situation.

That made it clear.

Austin was not on their side.

I activated my supernatural power to strengthen my body.

Close combat type.

-Bang!

“Kuhuk!”

I also hit the person next to me with the hilt of my sword.

I didn’t know what those guys were planning on doing.

However, if we acted before they could, nothing would happen to us.

It was the Darklands.

Laws didn’t apply to that place.

There, the one with the stronger punch was justice.

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